



OS



In soumis  
mois

La Krong

La Kier

Bon Me Thuo



Nha Trang



Ban Hoi



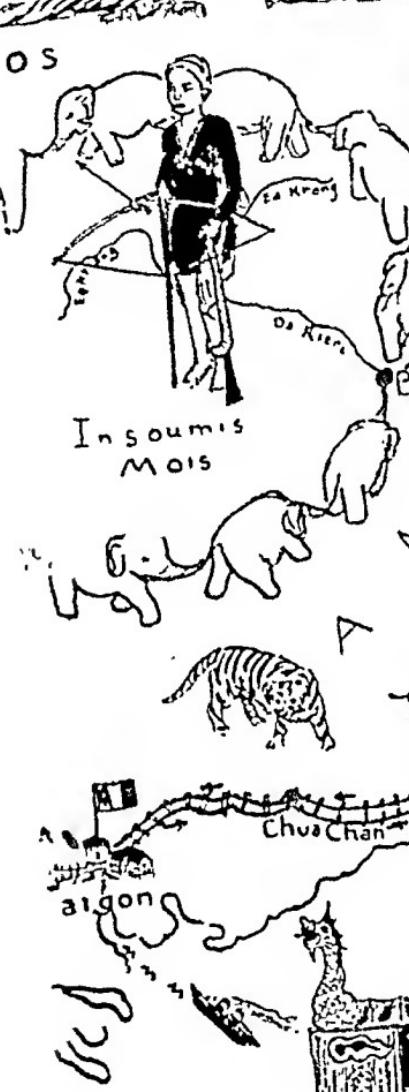
Phan Ri



Chu Chan

Phan Thiet

Aigon



South  
China Sea



Author's  
Route

Ship Train Motor Elephant

Through  
**Indo-China**  
And  
Bali





Copyright  
1938  
By GRACE THOMPSON SETON

*All rights reserved*

MAHARANA BHUPAL  
COLLEGE,  
UDAIPUR.

Class No.....

Book No.....

## CONTENTS

### BOOK ONE

#### Among the Poison Arrow Moïs and the Pipe Dreams of Angkor

Chapter		Page
I	SAIGON—THE START . . . . .	13
II	NHATRANG—THE RAILHEAD . . . . .	37
III	BEN METHOÛT—LAST FRENCH OUTPOST . . . . .	45
IV	THE RAHDES—FEAST OF THE WATER GENIE . . . . .	58
V	TRADING—A DJARAY ENCAMPMENT . . . . .	74
VI	BONNE DEUN—FIRST NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE . . . . .	85
VII	ON THE TRAIL—ABOUT ELEPHANTS . . . . .	91
VIII	A NIGHT AT DAK LAK—AN ABANDONED POSTE . . . . .	111
IX	HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM—TABUS—THE Matriarchs . . . . .	120
X	YEN LA ME—AMONG THE MNONGS—THE MEN . . . . .	142
XI	WE DINE AT YEN DANG . . . . .	155
XII	WE VISIT THE BIHS . . . . .	162
XIII	BACKTRACK . . . . .	172
XIV	PNOM-PENH—WE GO DEMOCRATIC . . . . .	182

## CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
XV ANGKOR—PIPE DREAMS PAST AND PRESENT	200
XVI ARANYA-PRADESA—FAREWELL INDO CHINA	214
XVII BANGKOK—SIGHT-SEEING REEL . . .	220
XVIII PENANG—A LETTER TO STURDZA . . .	242

## BOOK TWO

### THE LOTOS ISLE OF BALI a vignette of happy people

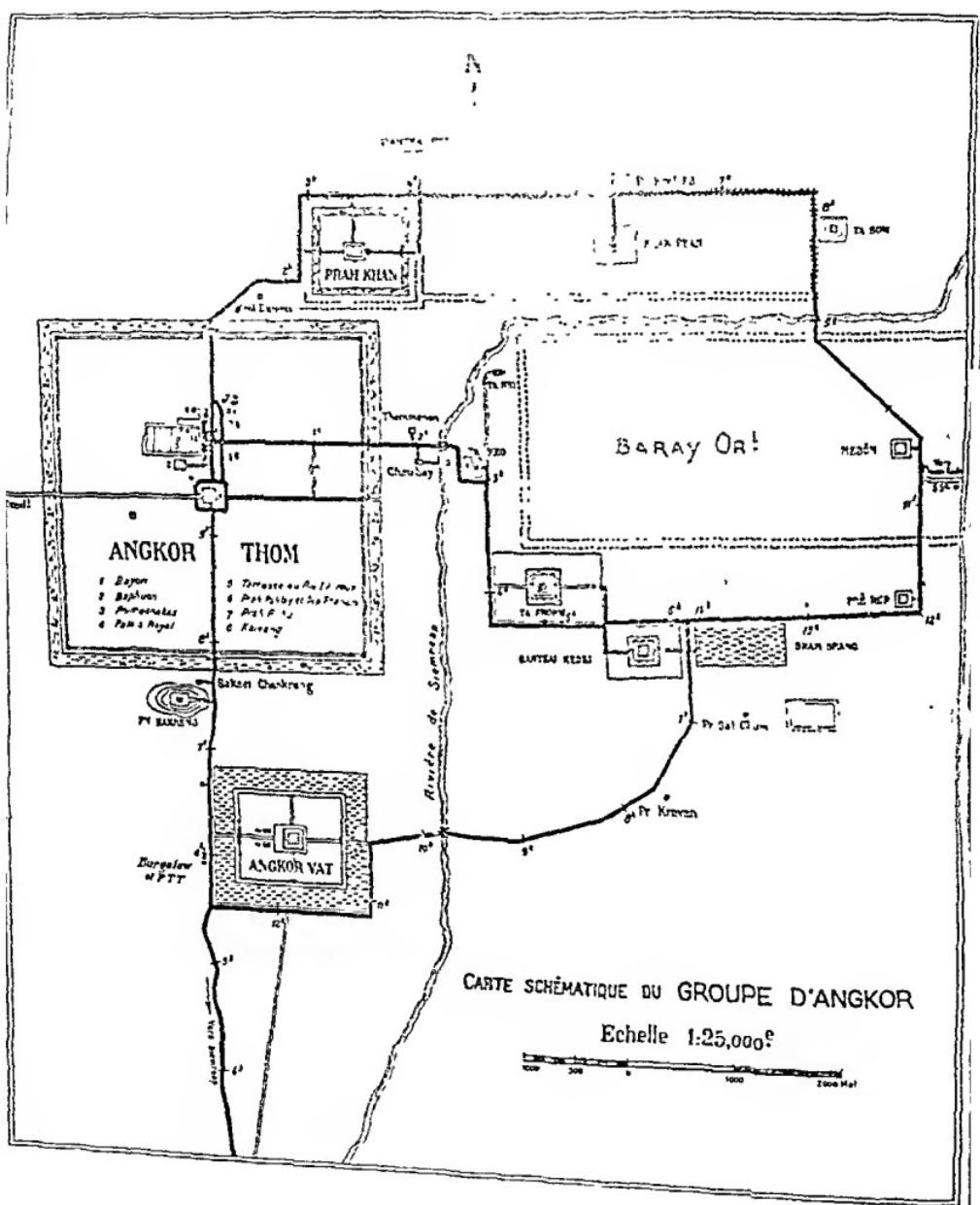
I THE 'DUTCH WIFE'—SANG-YANG GOD DANCE . . . . .	253
II FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI—MY FRIEND MELATI . . . . .	263
III TEMPLE DANCES AT KEDATON . . . . .	275
IV THE GREAT BURNING AT ABIANTIBUL . . . . .	282
V MELATI POSES; MRS. FIX-IT DISPOSES— FINIS ON STURDZA . . . . .	295

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	Facing Page
A YOUNG MNONG HUNTER (THE NEAREST THE AUTHOR EVER GOT TO A MOÏ HORSE)	.
THYRA . . . . .	62
THE CHIEF'S STAIRWAY . . . . .	63
A RAHDE CHIEFESS ON HER BACK PORCH . . . . .	66
A RAHDE SPIRIT TABLE ON BURIAL MOUND . . . . .	67
AT ANY <i>boire la jarre</i> ANYONE CAN BOOM THE TOM- TOM . . . . .	76
IT REQUIRES SKILL TO PLAY THE GONGS . . . . .	77
MOÏ TRANSPORTATION (THE AUTHOR'S TRAVELLING CAGE IN CENTRE) . . . . .	93
THE WARRIORS OF BEN YOUK IN BATTLE ARRAY . . . . .	101
HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM, MY BOYS MHOS (LEFT) AND ANTOK . . . . .	122
MNONG MATRIARCH AT BEN TE AR (INSET) A BIH CHIEFESS AT HOME . . . . .	123
BUILDING A LONGHOUSE . . . . .	130
A MNONG GIRL WITH A POT SHE HAS MADE . . . . .	131
MNONG WARRIORS TENDING THE BABIES . . . . .	146
A MOÏ HUNTER READY FOR THE TRAIL—BOW, POISONED ARROWS AND AXE . . . . .	147
A MATRIARCH, KNEE DEEP IN WATER, IS FISHING . . . . .	149
VERY SKILFUL IN THE USE OF BAMBOO AND RATTAN	
WE START OUT IN TWO PIROGUES—ITS GLOSSY SURFACE REFLECTS . . . . . LIKE A FLOOR OF BRASS . . . . .	164

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
I LAND AND APPROACH THESE THREE YOUNG MEN PROUDLY SHOWS HIS DENTAL STUBS . . . . .	165
THE CHIEFESS OF BUON TRAP AND HER HUSBAND GEDAC . . . . .	166
APSARAS ETCHING BY BEN SIEBERT OF DANCING MAIDENS. EVERY INSCRUTABLE SMILE—IS A CURTAIN CONCEALING UNMENTIONABLE LIGHTS . . . . .	167
MAPS OF BALI . . . . .	174
PRISONERS IN CHAINS—ERECTING GALA ARCHES OF ROYALTY . . . . .	208
ON THE CAUSEWAY OF ANGKOR WAT—AN UNFORGETTABLE SCENE IS STAGED . . . . .	209
YOUR WET RICEFIELDS IN MIRRORS SWIRL . . . . .	252
CARVINGS—EVERWHERE IN BALI . . . . .	255
MELATI . . . . .	259
A BANNER OF PALM STRIPS CUT INTO A PATTERN OF HOLY THINGS . . . . .	267
MOMAN MAKES A LITTLE ACHE OF BEAUTY IN THE HEART . . . . .	278
TIYA— <i>a Balinese madonna</i> . . . . .	279
THE MONSTROUS BULL COFFIN RESPLENDENT IN GOLD, SILVER AND PURPLE . . . . .	283
A LONG SINUOUS LINE OF GRACEFUL FIGURES . . . . .	292



## CHAPTER I

### SAIGON—THE START

“**T**HE best man for you is a strange creature—but he knows a lot about Angkor.” These few words by the American consul traject the Dreamer out of the deep into my third dimensional awareness.

“Strange creature!” I repeat, startled.

If I had known how strange a creature was to colour my experience of Indo China would I have had the courage to go on?

It is the tea hour at the club in Saigon. Through the wails and shrieks of the dance orchestra I am pouring into the ears of the patient consul my plaint for a guide to the ruined temples of Angkor several hundred miles to the north, still remote from railroads. Inured to the requests from stray travellers, demands ranging from how to get a shampoo to the purchase of a white elephant, the consul continues amiably:

“He is not an American, but speaks good English and perfect French and I believe knows a good deal of Annamese—has an Annamite living with him, a boy he has sort of sponsored. He is well-educated, has done translations for the Musée Colonial at times—and since you want to go alone and at your own gait . . .”

His voice trails off. Serious eyes look at me speculatively. This produces from me:

## POISON ARROWS

"What is his name? And what is the matter with him? Give me the story."

"Sturdza, Richard or George. He has an English name. His mother was Scotch, I think and he has a title, Baron or Prince, something like that. There is a story all right. He—well, he has missed too many boats home and has adopted the customs of the country a bit and at least one of its vices. He takes opium."

"Oh!"

In his capacity as host the consul turns to his other guests assembled around a table on the edge of the dancing space. The nondescript orchestra is grinding out Broadway Blues, a bozooka, chicken-squawker and boom-boomer contributing their demoniac dissonances. The consul's wife is being gracious to some people she has never seen before and never expects to see again—travellers passing through with a letter from 'a friend of a friend of mine', a retired lumber merchant and his wife from the middle west who are going around the world on the usual cruise. Helpless under the rapid-fire questions of what hardwood, what softwood trees can be found in French China, she suggests dancing—exchanges boredom for exercise—and does not fare so badly. The ever-genial consul takes on the wife and soon is perspiring freely from a gin ricky and the effort of steering one hundred and seventy pounds of feminine flesh around the room.

Another lady at the table has a diplomatic letter signed by an Assistant Secretary of State informing the consul and all consuls, consul generals *et al* that at the request of the senior senator from Pennsylvania, the State Department is glad to recommend such courtesies be offered the

## SAIGON—THE START

bearer, as are in accordance with official duties, a letter that sounds compelling and will avail her nothing, after the initial courtesy, unless she herself makes good. She is now invited to 'swing' with the consul in the waltz, dreamy with low lights. She is slim, smartly gowned, recently divorced and is forgetting it as fast as possible under the swiftly changing scenes of exotic travel.

Soothed by this terpsichorean effort the consul returns in time to greet a new guest. He is a French colonial, manager of a large rice plantation in the rich delta of the Me Kong. In Saigon on business, his white drill suit is worn a little carelessly, the trousers, cut high above the waist line, European fashion, show more creases than the regulation front and back line; the coat, pockets bulging a little, shows other signs of the humid, tropical heat, that even in January is almost more than one can bear immaculately. He has come from the rice trading centres, the rue Le Febre and rue Chaigneau, where transactions influence the market price and the world marts.

He refers to Saigon as the Paris of the East and as 'wide open'.

"What do I mean, madame? Why," the planter hesitates, "may I speak frankly? So many opium places. The most fashionable one is on the rue Tabert near the Armenian Consulate. In Cholon there are at least fifty. And the affairs of the heart so casual. You know the tabac opposite my hotel is an assignation place? The *sale vieux* who runs it makes a fat living from the tourists. A man comes in to buy tobacco, the old man chats with him, winks an eye, asks if he is lonely, would he like a charming companion for the evening or the afternoon,

## POISON ARROWS

not a congaï (native woman), nor a prostitute, but a nice girl who may like a little adventure. No harm done, and not expensive, well, not too much. Pay the lady nothing. Oh, no. It is not that kind of an affair. Often the old fellow hooks his fish and collects fifty, a hundred, two hundred piastres, what he thinks the man will pay. And the man is usually very well pleased. He meets a refined girl, often very well-educated, perhaps the wife of a petty official, who is bored and has too much time on her hands and who has been caught in the old man's web. Perhaps she has gone in the tabac for cigarettes—is in the habit of going there. One day the old man says: 'You are such a pretty girl. It is a pity you have to wear those old clothes. Why not buy something smart on the rue Catinet? Can you not afford it? Tush. That is nothing. Of course you can. Here is fifty piastres. I will lend it to you. You can pay me any time. Your husband need never know. It is nothing. I am an old man and have no daughter. I lost her. I want nothing from you. Just to see you happy and with pretty things. A lovely woman should have them.' Some of the women are caught in this trap. They buy the hat or stockings and gew-gaws and perhaps nothing happens for weeks or months. Then when the old devil has need of her he soon manages to frighten her into meeting a tourist, a stranger who will go away and no one will know. Once she has done this, she is in the old man's clutches. And," the planter adds with a slight pause, "perhaps at times she rather enjoys it."

The consul now turns to us. "Don't let this chap fill you with too many tall stories. We are a pretty fair lot here, after all. Opera, in season, fine shops, museum, library."

The consul is a mine of information about the country;

## SAIGON—THE START

he performs his duties in a highly competent manner—and this is sincere praise. A habit of knocking about the world in out-of-the-way places has forced the conclusion that too many of Uncle Sam's earth's-end officials cannot compare with the British in knowing what they can and cannot do in an unusual situation. Is this the result of our new-fledged democracy or of the scarcity of career men?

The consul responds freely to questions and holds forth upon the richness of the rice lands, especially in the delta of the Me Kong, which forms what is known as Cochin China.

"So rapidly," he says, "does this make new land by depositing its silt that it encroaches upon the China Sea between seven and eight hundred yards a year. It, with Cambodia, is one of the largest rice-producing areas in the world and brings much wealth to the French Colonies, as well as providing the principal food staple of the inhabitants. It exports an annual surplus of about a million and a half tons.

"Native palm sugar," continues the consul, "is an active commodity, and, of course, fish, the other food staple. The Mother Me Kong floods an area at its maximum of over four thousand square miles, and forms the great lake called Tonle Sap which literally swarms with fish at this time. It is estimated that fifty thousand tons of fish are drawn from the water with no more effort on the part of the natives than to cast their nets. A few hauls will replenish their larders for a year."

He also explains that 'nuoc mam' which is a necessary part of every meal in Annam must be made of fresh fish and shell fish and salt, sometimes combined with chile peppers. The salty tang and brown look of it

## POISON ARROWS

makes me think of the soya bean sauce that stimulates the Chinese palates to further eating.

Then an imp of fate puts into the mouth of the French Colonial, again addressing me, this question:

"Since you like queer things why don't you go into the Moï country? I got as far as Ben Methoût once."

He rambles on with entrancing oddments of his contacts with these primitive peoples. Other fragments I have heard fly into place to make a picture, like a rapid throw-back in a movie, and the desire full-fledged is born to go into this unexplored region for a look-see.

When my turn comes again for the consul's attention, my desire has crystallized into resolution. I tell him:

"I want to get among the unsubdued Moïs, *les insoumis*—to go to the very heart of your Indo China, far beyond the Annamese villages and even the last French outpost. If I can get among those Moïs who have no traffic with the outside, who have never seen a white woman, never submitted to the French, perhaps I can understand what a matriarchal system really means. There is so little known about them, even in this day of Sunday papers and news reels. Will Baron Sturdza do for this?"

The consul looks at me disapprovingly, raises his voice over the caterwauling of the jazz.

"It will be awfully hot and the rains are awful—but this is the dry season, of course. There are plenty of pythons and tigers lurking around and wild elephants, ugly customers. And the jungle is full of insects, leeches and red ants and ticks. And the marshes breed fever. No civilized conditions, you know?"

"What of it? There will be marvellous peacocks and

## SAIGON—THE START

pheasants and orchids. I want to see it all first hand—to know just how the Moïs wrest a living from tropical nature."

"I do not know anyone to guide you. Nobody has been in there," the consul continues. "But if you insist upon going—it will be pretty rough—I can think of only two men who might be of any use to you. One is Sturdza.

"The other is a tiger hunter. He has taken several parties out, men, of course. Not where you want to go but further south on the Darlac plateau. He is a bit of a rough-neck. Sturdza is a gentleman, by birth and training. He would help you with your interpretation. The other fellow would have no idea what you are driving at—and you must have a male escort. A woman travelling alone around these parts just is not understood. Yes, Sturdza is the only one I can think of. Not ideal but," with raised eyebrows, "you must begin to realize the difficulties of exploring the Moïs. He is very well-read and when he has not hit too many pipes, can be entertaining and, as I said, he is trained in the best European traditions, not a colonial. You can manage him—I think." The consul looks at me slightly frowning: "Why don't you give up this idea and go to Angkor? It is not going to be a picnic. The unsubdued Moïs use poison arrows with the greatest of ease and are avid raw-flesh eaters and have many tabus. You would have to tread softly in those places where the French authority is not yet established. Angkor is much simpler, and hard enough. . . ."

"No. Please. The Moïs first. I will try almost anything once."

## POISON ARROWS

With this inelegant assertion, the matter is settled. Thus in the dusk of a tropical hour surrounded by a polyglot group of transplanted Europeans and imitative Asians is projected the trail of a strange journey with the queerest human I have ever met. I begin a struggle along the elusive windings and arduous necessities of travel in a primitive country, believing that I am pursuing a study of architectural glories of a vanished race and of a matriarchal survival among little-known people in Indo China but I find that the trail really leads through the uncharted hazards of a strange human being, a product of sophisticated Europe and age-heavy, cynical Asia.

So close the book, anthropologist and archæologist, if you seek a scientific treatise on the Moïs or encyclopædic research on the Khmers. Others may do that. This is a story of character and strange emotion as it took place amid the wildest part of mysterious Indo China.

The hour of the apéritif is over. The shops and business houses have closed for it as they do between eleven a.m. and two p.m. for the *déjeuner* and siesta time.

In the heavy twilight, the tables around us suddenly become deserted. Everyone is seeking a tub and change before the late dinner. The consul finds he has enough time to show me Cholon, the Chinese quarters three miles away on a perfect road. The French know how to encourage their automobilism and to beat the devil around the stump. This Chinese City of quarter of a million, on a finger of the sea, that facilitates alleged smuggling transactions, seems not to be subject to all the restrictions that affect the hundred and fifty thousand

## SAIGON—THE START

inhabitants of its neighbour in Saigon, the Paris of the Orient. It is essentially Chinese in character. Gay with plants in beautiful jars of blue and green pottery from small factories around Cholon, it is also clean—that is French influence.

The life of the tea house, the ping-pong girl, the opium joint and the gambling place flourishes unashamed. Among the Chinese merchants millions of piastres exchange hands behind closed doors as they barter commodities, rice, rubber, sugar, also tea, coffee and opium. This last is a government monopoly. Astounding quantities of the crude stuff are shipped for refining in the government controlled factory on the rue Paul Blanchy. It spreads an acrid, half-nauseating sweetish odour on the neighbourhood every hour of the twenty-four, and turns out huge quantities of the sticky paste in containers of one pound, halves and quarters at regulated price. Twelve million piastres net profit, it is said, annually augments the French Government's coffers from the drug, and that there are ninety thousand users of it in Saigon alone.

Everywhere the tabac is licensed to sell opium as well as tobacco. The small R.O. sign outside tells those interested, and perhaps a third of the population is, that Regie d'Opium is obtainable. Often a couch or two, narrow six-foot wooden benches, are available at a tabac, lest the purchaser be in too great need of the drug to travel further.

It is said that more women than men use it, but more often in the privacy of the home. The prevailing characteristics of the natives on the streets and in cafés seem to be a sallow skin, half moons under liquid eyes

## POISON ARROWS

that gaze within wearily, the whole air languid, unless it is vividly animated.

The consul's motor passes the railroad station on the rue des Marins. He tells me that the six kilometres of rail that connect with Saigon is probably the richest line of its length in the world. It earns a hundred and twenty-five thousand piastres a year. (There are ten French francs to the piastre.)

We stop by the kerb beside a tea house. Through the open windows and balcony I observe the sing-song girls in short black satin trousers that reveal stick-like legs in gaudy stockings and soft satin slippers. These usually match the high-coloured little coat. The Chinese fringe of oiled hair is cut straight across the forehead, dead black in sharp contrast to the painted cheeks. One girl was accompanying the raucous wails of a moon-violin by appropriate staccato notes in the usual high-pitched harsh voice. This shrill ditty told of sorrow and abandonment and general unworthiness in the approved Chinese vein. Poor little 'flower' girls, under the sway of a fa wong (procurer) who drums up trade and takes the earnings, pays for the necessary government license of eighty piastres a year exacted by the police, pays for poor quarters and poor food, but allows money for fripperies and trinkets dear to the feminine heart.

Knowing well the sad picture of 'lily foot' and 'flower' from China days, there is no need to linger. A memory is vivid of an opium establishment in Hong Kong when one of these professional entertainers, for a sing-song girl is not necessarily a prostitute, was demonstrating how to prepare a pipe for smoking. With a long metal skewer she rolled a small ball of the paste about the size of her

## SAIGON—THE START

little finger tip round and round in the flame of a small lamp until the lump, shrinking as it cooked, was ready to insert in a long ivory pipe. Suddenly she reached over the table across the shoulders of a Chinese mandarin, her patron, and gave me a vicious pinch on the arm. Then, laughing childishly, she tweaked my nose, by no means gently. The mandarin joined in the laugh at my expense, taking it as a demonstration of playful goodwill. After a second pinching, I removed myself from the vicinity of such agile fingers and did not voice my suspicion that the ardour of this painful approval was dictated by malice towards the foreigner rather than by affection.

The wealthier men here, whose women remain in the home, have the habit of these laughing little chatterboxes and pay only casual attention to them. Smiling and calm they transact business at the tea house or sit relaxed playing dominoes or mahjong and sipping chum chum and countless cups of unsweetened tea. They have learned through generations to live at a tempo consistent with the devitalizing climate of their environment.

I have some refreshing chilled cocoanut milk served in its own shell, not to be rivalled for quenching thirst in an ungermy way, the consul has a Singapore sling and we roll smoothly back to Saigon and the evening plans.

The consul's kind efforts to oblige the vagaries of an exploring female promises that my researches concerning the poppy, especially *Papaver somniferum*, may become personal as well as empiric. The next morning a card is brought to my room at the Hotel Majestic while I am trying to get other than air from the hot water faucet and am resigning myself to the usual cold tub. It an-

## POISON ARROWS

nounces that Baron György Antalffy-Sturdza presents his compliments and waits below. The consul has not forgotten his promise.

The gentleman's voice is suave; a little eager, his blue eyes abnormally bright, black enlarged pupils; his pale lips sensitive and unquiet; shirt cuffs a little frayed but they and the linen suit are freshly laundered; his manners are those of the beau-monde. The keynote of his personality is repressed nervousness, a too eager desire to come to terms, held in check by a fastidious sense of the 'honour of a gentleman' who will not misrepresent the facts to gain an end.

The expense of the little expedition, its equipment and Baron Sturdza's salary assumes unthought of proportions. The torrent of volatile remarks about his mother, his family background of nobility, his clients at Angkor, mixed with practical details of rifle and ammunition licenses, amount and kind of food, bedding and supplies to take, is disconcerting. So is the slow, full look of appraisal he bestows upon the person of his prospective employer whenever he pauses to permit a question. Never in a varied experience of world ports have I encountered so un-American a type speaking English—fluent, beautiful English. The gentleman twisting his sun-burnt Panama gives no sense of security. Yet there appears to be no other way open. After two hours, Baron Antalffy-Sturdza leaves with a tentative agreement in his pocket that in three days' time, that much being needed for arrangements, we will depart for Moïland and later Angkor.

A day ensues of struggle with official red-tape concerning permits. I quickly learn to forget my real purpose

## SAIGON—THE START

for going into the Moïs country and to develop a more normal wish to hunt tiger. This entails another expensive license and does not clear me from suspicion. One tired clerk passes me on to another wilted clerk until after much waiting I face the *chef de Bureau*. My passport and official letters being in good order, his pen hovers over the necessary signature while he remarks: "Madame need not go so far to *faire la chasse*. Saigon has possibilities." I try to look arch and innocent at the same time.

"Perhaps when I come back—you can tell me about the hunting?" Meanwhile pointing to the permit. "*Avec plaisir. Je serai enchanté*," comes the murmur as he signs.

I struggle through the intricacies of many purchases in a strange land in strange tongues and return to the hotel; tired, crumpled but triumphant. All is going well for a start the next night if my prospective courier keeps his promises.

A chit is handed to me as I am about to resign my person to the uncertain fate of a French lift. It is from the clerk and states that a lady has been trying to reach me all afternoon and to phone at once as the matter is very important and the party is waiting.

My one thought is the problematical Sturdza, probably calling off the arrangements. Difficulties with the connection, a string of ineffectual 'allo, 'allo, 'allo, while I drip and fume in the sweat-box of a booth. At last a woman's voice, speaking French with a colonial accent.

Speaking slowly, the cold voice nicks out the phrases like so many dagger pricks. It warns as one woman to another the impossibilities of taking Baron György Sturdza on my proposed trip into the interior. That

## POISON ARROWS

Madame has been misinformed if she thinks the gentleman will go; that he does not go away with Madame. What reason? Ah, Madame, there is reason enough! Has no one told Madame that the gentleman is not always reliable, at times not quite well? Neither must Madame trust him with money—Madame is warned—Monsieur le baron will not leave Saigon. Ah no, it is not needful to give a name. Madame does not know the speaker, but dismiss le baron, be careful, be wise, avoid much trouble—*Prenez gardez—soyez sage—éviter beaucoup de peine—* with these staccato phrases ringing, I hang up the receiver.

This anonymous stuff is even more disconcerting than my visionary baron himself. Could I really risk this enigma on a plunge into the unknown? Again I turn to my father confessor, the consul. I ask for an interview, catch him as he is just going out to dinner, tell him the story.

"Hm, I think I know who it is. Jealous—you can never get away from sex in this country—if you can anywhere. There is no one else I know of who will fit in at all with your scheme. He is a gentleman, European trained. He promised me he would cut down on the opium and I think he will keep his word. Don't you think you can manage him?"

I bless the consul's sturdy Americanism and his judgment of human nature, especially these transplanted ones drifting about the orient.

"Manage him? Of course. If you think it will work, I am for going on with it."

"Let's talk to Sturdza. I sent for him."

The somewhat embarrassed Baron Antalffy-Sturdza

## SAIGON—THE START

explains that he owed the owner of the voice 'a little money'. He asks me for and gets an advance on his salary, promises to 'make it right'. Whatever mental reservation the consul and I may have is our own business.

A few minutes later my Hungarian would-be courier and I leave the consulate sworn to keep our rendezvous at the Saigon station the next night to take the train to Nhatrang, the terminal of the railroad that soon will be projected all along the Annamese and Laotian coast.

Another mysterious telephone call comes through in the morning. I ignore it.

At five-thirty, the time agreed, I am at the railroad station. No Sturdza; but it is early. I have my bags, bundles, boxes piled into a first class compartment, a couchette. Sturdza was to have got the tickets. The poison of the telephone voice—do not trust him with money—darts through me. Nervous waiting, minutes are hours. A black cloud hangs over the city. That heavy suspense before the tropical storm, its thunder and lightning chimes well with my mood. At least, after this I will attend to the disbursements. Not that I question his honesty. His ability to dot the i's and cross the t's. That is something else.

The tempest now breaks and I seek the back platform of the train to watch for my guide and interpreter, the link between civilization and savagery upon which I am relying. How much, I realize as the minutes drag by.

My man of surprises simply is not there. The sky now opens and dumps a deluge upon the city, jagged lightning, appalling claps of thunder. Vainly I seek among the last passengers scurrying through the stream-

## POISON ARROWS

ing rain curtain for, to me at the moment, the most desired face in all the world.

Six o'clock. "*En voiture, mesdames, messieurs.*" The guards slam doors and the train pulled out with Baron György Antalffy-Sturdza not on it.

I am facing the unknown alone. Even the town of my destination is not clear. What a fool I was to leave the tickets to Sturdza! Standing forlornly on the back of the platform in the gloom of that wild downpour, I try to remember where I am going. The place has a queer name that has not sufficiently registered. It takes all night and is at the end of the railroad in the heart of Annam several hundred miles away, so I can stay on till I have to get off. I wonder if there is a European hotel. The Annamese inn would be too awful—the food, the sleeping and toilet arrangements, the customs—just impossible, Sturdza has said, for me, although it appears he has frequently gone native enough to use them.

A lone woman in Indo China does not accost men if she can help it, even to ask questions. I return to the little compartment crowded with my luggage to await a session with the conductor of this alien *chemin-de-fer*. A session that cannot be otherwise than painful, as my French often does not 'click' with the native Indo Chinese and I speak no Annamese—as yet. Oh where is that will o' the wisp of an interpreter! What has happened to him? No matter what it is I shall not go back. I came to study the Moïs and study the Moïs I shall *dans vult*—to echo the cry of the Crusaders.

The train rattles and bumps and coughs huge cinders over a narrow-gauge single track in bad repair. No dinner—perhaps eating is still a pleasant thing. I decide

## SAIGON—THE START

to use the much-advertised wagon restaurant. At the risk of limb and life I effect a crossing over the open platforms to a rattling car where four small tables are laid with grimy dinner service, shimmying perilously. I take a seat opposite a face slightly familiar which appears above a pair of hands that are firmly holding onto the table, a bottle and a glass. Fortunately it belongs to a French photographer. In Saigon the day before, his films and my gold were exchanged.

The Beau Rivage, at Nhatrang, he tells me is a good hotel, the only European one. But surely, Madame is not travelling alone? No lady should travel alone, especially in the interior. But it is impossible, *c'est incroyable!* Madame should get a man, an old man if she likes, but someone to protect her. The French Colonial will not understand a lady travelling alone. Madame may be annoyed. He has seen in the journal that Madame is an exploratrice. But, even so, Madame must take a man with her and so on, *ad infinitum*.

The soup sought a new level on the table cloth, the ragout nearly accomplished a descent into my lap, water and coffee were hastily transferred to a thirsty interior, likewise a small cognac contributed by the photographer for a *bon appétit*. A half-hour of this. Suddenly the silver and china dance a still more convulsive jig and remain quiet. The train stops. It is a small signal station.

Looking out of the window, through the rain now falling slackly, a pale strained face wavers up from the platform. Sturdza!

The wild eyes gleam in recognition and relief and disappear. The train is moving. Onto the car steps are projected bags, rifles, bundles, and a tall, bedraggled,

## POISON ARROWS

quivering man. After a race by motor of seventy kilometres, around corners, over railroad crossings with danger signals out, at sixty miles an hour through the rain and dark, wagering a first week's salary to the taxi man if he makes the station ahead of the train—my guide has arrived! He has delivered himself as agreed.

His is a crazy story of being run into and dumped out, his baggage scattered over the street in the downpour. He in a rickshaw, colliding with a motor. Not very good at time telling—what opium dreamer is?—he allowed no extra time to catch the train. The smile and shrug of the photographer, when Sturdza makes his dramatic appearance, gulps down some cognac and chews a nibble of opium dross, is comprehensive, Gallic.

Life assumes a rosier hue. The garde and conductor now become helpful. A compartment next door is found for Sturdza which he soon seeks to restore his balance with a few pipes. It seems I shall have ample opportunity of observing the tyranny of the poppy and its effect upon character and brain action. I stretch out on the hard leather couch, guiltless of linen and thankfully drift off into sleep as we bump and rattle through the blackness.

In the middle of the night I become more comfortable. It rises to consciousness that this is due to the train being stopped. The guard's horn, little whistles up ahead and lights outside denote some confusion. What a fuss these people make running their tuppenny train. I sleep. I wake—ah! At last we are moving.

At dawn I look out of the window. Surely we are going the wrong way. I stare in bewilderment at the unmistakable silhouette of a big city. Now a guard routs

## SAIGON—THE START

me out with the clarion call: "Saigon, mesdames, messieurs!"

Everybody departs. Hastily I call Sturdza and receiving no answer go to his wide open door, there to observe that gentleman flat on his back; cheeks flushed, lost to my upside-down world. When the guard finally arouses him out of his pipe sleep, I am standing on the platform of Saigon station which twelve hours before I left with keen emotions. My emotions are still keen. Surrounded by my impedimenta, I feel like Dido in the midst of ruin. Sturdza, eyes very bright, manner excessively nervous, informs me that some wild elephants got on the track last night, charged a freight train or something weird like that, derailed several cars and we could go no further.

More parley and gesticulations evolves the information that a day train, mostly freight, but with a coach attached is leaving shortly. So we transfer our luggage and sit in a dirty second-class car with Annamites of all sorts. There is no bottled water, no food fit to eat, literally dangerous to eat, and smells of many kinds. Rotten meat, stinking vegetables, onions, garlic, rank tobacco smoke, kerosene from the leaky lamps, sweaty bodies, bundles of stale clothing—heat, dirt, cinders, a Pandora's box of trouble. Hour after hour, jammed four in a seat meant for three, open windows unprotected by screens or awnings—hunger, thirst, squalling babies, children being unsanitary on the floor, gory with splotches of expectorated betel saliva, a phantasmagoria of new and unpleasant sensations.

About ten hours of this, we arrive at the scene of the wreck. Like ants, everyone gathers up bags and bundles

## POISON ARROWS

and toils around the torn up track and derailed cars to a train waiting beyond. Again we crawl and bump onward to a destination which should have been reached from Saigon in eight hours.

The forest we are passing through is beautiful, giant bamboo and rubber plants, then come ant-hills and patches of pampas grass and rice paddies. Sturdza tells me that Annam has a hard wood called trac, a kind of ebony and species of mahogany, called go (gah); many oil trees like scrub oaks, called yow-kaben, and the kapoc tree which furnishes a light waterproof material for aeroplane cloth and for life preservers.

I learn a few Annamese words from Sturdza. Thi (tee) means woman, also congaï (a Frenchman has one for mistress, never wife), co (koa), aunt; ba, revered mother. All animate things commence with con; inanimate with K. Van is man, also nuque; ahn is elder brother; em younger brother, according to the numerals, but a child is never given the number One; that always signifies Buddha.

I am sandwiched between a sister of charity (cannot imagine how she survives her heavy woollen wrappings) and a middle class congaï. She wears a heavy yellow silk kerchief on the head, a pair of black satin trousers called lank (silk), and kewung (trousers); a keao (coat) of maroon silk and der (soft slippers). She holds hands in front of her face when she talks to us.

"What about the wild life?" I ask, bringing Sturdza's thought back to the jungle. "It must be the same as it has been for hundreds of years. Are there still plenty of wild elephants and tigers?"

"Yes. When we get into the Moï country and settle

## SAIGON—THE START

for a while Madame must have a mirador built. It is a watching place for tigers, usually in a tree above the bait. Tigers like their meat high. The panthers will come after the second day but if the tiger has not made the kill himself, it may be several days before he will be interested. They both like the peacock as a tidbit. "The meat," Sturdza continues, "is very good eating, its colouring is gorgous and the pheasants, every kind are in the forests, their iridescent beauty unbelievable. Also there is the agouti, a rodent, looks like a tiny deer, so sensitive. I tamed one, the cat attacked it and it died of fright. And parakeets, but no big parrots. The congaï is tender hearted about birds. Often she will buy an imprisoned bird and release it for a prayer to Buddha."

My companion is silent for a moment, but the urge to talk is strong. His trip-hammer memory hops from one subject to another: "We have come at the right time in the dry season. The rainfall here in six months, in the rainy season, is around eight metres, that is about twenty-six feet. Madame has noticed how many are the rubber plantations since we have left Saigon? In the uplands much tea and coffee also is grown. In France one is forbidden to lean out of the window. Here Madame will notice the sign merely warns that it is dangerous to lean out."

I ask about the cost of living.

"Ah, one can manage on one hundred and fifty piastres a month—two hundred is better, four hundred is enough for anyone. Two dollars gold a day, food ninety cents, rent a dollar, opium costs from one-eighty to two piastres a day."

These figures do not make sense to me, but I remem-

## POISON ARROWS

ber that mother disdained business and the money question.

"Mummy brought me up ignorant of business—'Why be a grocer's clerk, George? The art of conversation should be cultivated.' Her mind was filled with beautiful things. She was ignorant of the sordid life. She believed in the divine rights of kings and of her right to her high station."

I remark: "The opium seems cheap enough. How does one smoke it?"

"Yes, not dear. But one must always find money enough to get it—every day. The government gets rich on it. How? Pierce the ball of a poppy. Out comes the juice. This is cooked and again mixed with dross for the pipes and cooked and put in clay pots. You saw the factory at Cholon? Twenty cents for a small pot, about three pipes full. A metal pin for rolling the ball, a glass lamp to heat it. Pipe made of porcelain or metal, stem bamboo and porcelain bowl. Opium contains thebaine, a white crystalline alkaloid. India opium is rich in thebaine and poor in morphia. Persian opium is heavy with morphia. Women are supposed to be excited and men dulled by smoking, but I do not believe that. I always want to talk a mile a minute as Americans say, that is, if I have to keep up and awake. Many Chinese smoke when they want to do smart business. They smoke it as a pick-me-up. It is miraculous. Opium takes the place of sleep—but that can be abused. Like ambergris, opium is an aphrodisiac. Gives straight ups and downs and desires. The Spanish word for opium is Opi and there is a new very popular drug from Mexico, the marijuana as well as the mescaline they make from cactus."

## SAIGON—THE START

"Sturdza, what do you mean by opium giving straight ups and downs?"

"Why—the visions, Madame." A pause. Then he adds: "They say that peppermint and vanilla are aphrodisiacs. Do you know, Madame?"

"No—I tried amber once in Cairo, but it only upset my tummy—not at all romantic."

The flow of words is slowing, interspersed by prodigious yawns. Sturdza, pale and silent, begins to droop in the seat opposite me.

I am getting an intimate picture of native life. How pampered our bodies are! To be hungry and thirsty, tired, dirty, hot, intrudes too much upon the divine consciousness of well-being one would like to maintain. The Annamites seem to be supporting a normal condition.

The general discomfort becomes acutely localized when a large section of coal lands in my right eye and refuses to be dislodged. Sturdza is sympathetic, tries to help. At a way station he forages for food, finds some oranges and a sealed tin of biscuits. Saying for me not to worry, he is only going into another car, he disappears and after an hour returns from the freight car ahead with some doubtful-looking tea in his travelling cup, says he has personally seen the water boiled on a charcoal stove for twenty minutes. I suspect he has also taken a pipe as he seems refreshed and yawns have ceased. He has energy enough to take down from the rack a heavy bag and extract from it two pieces of chocolate. With this sumptuous fare we break our fast.

More hours pass. The black tropical night enfolds us like a blanket. I feel something different in my lap.

## POISON ARROWS

The light in the coach is very dim. About to strike a match to investigate this new surprise, a strong smell of kerosene stops me. I am being drenched with the inflammable fluid from a leaky lamp overhead, some fastening is loose from the shaking of this car which seems to have parted company with its springs and to be travelling on its trucks. As the lamp has practically transferred its contents to my clothing, we sit in the darkness for more stygian hours.

## CHAPTER II

### NHATRANG—THE RAILHEAD

At one in the morning of a new day the train comes to its final stop, at Nhatrang, four hundred and nine miles from Saigon after twenty-nine hours from the original start. The disgorged horde of jabbering natives soon melt into the darkness. No motor car, no bus, no *pousse-pousse* in sight, even the waiting-room is locked. The engine expires with a last sniffle, indifferent to the tired travellers it has dumped upon an inhospitable Annamese town. That haven of refuge, the Beau Rivage, is six miles away. Sturdza reiterates that the hotel bus will surely come, as our wire sent in the morning must have been received. But if it does not come, perhaps he can find someone to take a message. We must wait. It will not do to leave the luggage! People are not always honest. I droop onto a bedroll. Sturdza hunches on his duffle bag. More weary waiting.

A bus drawn by a decrepit horse finally appears. The train being very late, the driver has waited till he heard of its arrival before starting. The East never hurries.

The hotel is comfortable. My large airy bedroom has European type furniture, a private balcony overlooking the sea and a well-equipped bathroom with at least the cold water faucets working and ventilated by a high

## POISON ARROWS

window, opening on the corridor. It seems heaven, even though an inflamed eye is agonizingly obtrusive.

Sturdza nobly appears as promised at 7 a.m. to take me to a French doctor he knows in the town, who is working with the Pasteur Institute. This specializes in the tropical diseases so common in these latitudes. The great Calmette, whose research developed the first snake serum, has worked here, says Sturdza, and Dr. Yersin is the present head. The doctor friend proves skilful, extracts the rock from the eye and gives prescriptions for a sore throat and for control of the python, by which name shall be designated that section of the anatomy usually called the intestines. This trouble maker in a more delicate narrative would not be mentioned, but it seems necessary to brush in a few strokes at times in order to convey a true picture of what every unacclimated traveller off the beaten track in the tropics sooner or later has to consider.

Two weeks rest are prescribed, so I decide to take two days. Sturdza puts in several hours very politely wringing out bandages for the eye and heating water on a spirit lamp for the throat while I lie on a chaise-longue in a darkened room. His talk pours out a torrent of phrases.

"Ah, Madame, you lie still. I will do all. Am I not a good nurse? See, is that not well-done? I learned that in the hospital. I—I was in a motor accident twelve years ago. Ah, Madame, that was when my life broke. I—I had a beautiful wife, a happy home. I was strong. I was trained for the militaire. My mother, ah my sainted, wonderful mother, attended to that. She made me have a strong body and made me study so I could be an orna-

## NHATRANG—THE RAILHEAD

ment to the great family into which I was born. My father was of almost royal blood. His side of the family out of power now. Sturdza is a Roumanian name. Hungarian noble families often intermarry. But my mother! She was so beautiful, so gifted. Her glorious voice sounds in my ears now. She used to say 'my little George'—she always called me that, the English way, for she was highly born too, a Scotswoman, 'my little George must grow up to be a fine man. I must always be proud of him'. She used to correct my English. She did not like the accent my teacher had. I was with her much. When I grew up, I was with her whenever I could. Even when I was a big boy I used to crawl upon her lap and she would laugh and say: 'You are too big, my George.'

"Then for hours she would read to me, English, always English when we were alone together, and tell me stories of the great men. And I would sit at her feet with my head in her lap or kneel beside her with my head on her breast and look over the book too."

On and on about his mother, tender intimacies, how she taught him good manners, good speech, the 'code of a gentleman'. What she said. What he said. What she did. What he did. If he branches off to another thought, sooner or later it reminds him of something about his mother.

A direct question checks him temporarily. He brings a well-furnished mind to bear upon it. He has not been unobservant in his fifteen years out here. Gradually, I piece the fragments together: He had some money. The family supplied a small income. He was married to a Frenchwoman. He had a small diplomatic job which

## POISON ARROWS

gave him a certain standing in the community. Life was going along pleasantly. Then the motor accident that smashed him to death's door. Months of pain in a hospital, morphine, morphine. Then, when he was getting better, opium. Months of convalescence. The enervating climate and worry over his attractive wife, who had formed the habit of amusing herself without him. Money from home stopped! Financial difficulties, curtailment of living, loss of his portfolio, loss of friends and loss of wife. I do not know just how. The opium is his solace. He obtains some translating to do and other small jobs of a clerical nature, but is not steady enough to keep a permanent position.

"Is my mother alive, Madame? Ah, no. She—she left me two years ago. But I have not seen her for many years. Almost the last day before I left home, I said to her: 'Mummy, do you think a lady should come into my room and kiss a young man?' she said: 'This is no young woman coming into your room but an old mother tucking in her baby——' How old was I? Let me think. I was thirty-two. For three hours all the last evening I sat on the floor, this head on her lap, listening as she read to me. I intended to go home—but the accident happened. It is better so. She would have been unhappy to see me now, my wife gone and in my small Annamese home——" He rarely speaks of his habit and we tacitly ignore it.

The next afternoon he is reading to me from a French guide book. He translates easily without pausing into an English that flows along smoothly. I am better and no longer bandaged. I order tea. Seated opposite each other at a table, I pour some tea into a cup and hand it to

## NHATRANG—THE RAILHEAD

him. "Sugar?" "Two, please." "Lime?" He raises a protesting hand. His voice softens to a caress.

"Ah, you make me think of my beautiful mother. You too can be kind. You are not always the business lady. You can be gentle and *douce*! This room so quiet, intimate. It is like home—a feeling I have not known for a long, long time. Only with Mummy—and now you. You have a heart! You——"

I cease to be gentle and sweet and reply coolly: "Yes, Baron Sturdza. Of course I can be human and feminine. But for the duration of this trip, I shall try to be only intelligent. We are going to study the Moïs." This sounds so stodgy. I keep on talking to bridge over an awkward moment. "It's nearly two months straight travel, you know, from American bathrooms, electricity and printing presses. I have told you I want to see first hand, those women who hold the purse strings under the survival of a matriarchal system which is as old as primitive civilization. Where primogeniture follows the eldest daughter instead of the eldest son. I have traced it on the West Coast of India, among the Andean peaks and some North American Indians. Perhaps among the unsubdued Moïs I shall find the women enjoying a social status which for all our votes for women, the American and European does not have. A status lost long ago by the Greek and Roman matrons after matriarchy ceased to flourish among them.

"That is the reason for this little jaunt. Let us be as friendly as possible, but this is a business arrangement. Yes?" A pause. Then:

"As you wish, Madame. Now I will go to complete the affair of the motor for to-morrow morning. We

## POISON ARROWS

should start at dawn. I regret we had so much trouble getting one. I must be sure his car is in shape. The natives seem to think a motor is a genie and will run without essence and oil no matter how much they abuse it. It is three hundred kilometres to Ben Methoût. The road is far from good the latter part. We must get there before dark if possible. If Madame does not need me any more this evening, I may pay a visit elsewhere in the town."

We discuss travel details. Soon he departs with a sly little smile on his face as he remarks: "I hope you rest well and as for me, my time is my own until morning."

Is he going to have a night of it with the French doctor? "Good luck, my friend," I call after him.

Feeling restless and not well, I decide to forget it by making a demi-toilette and going to the dining-room of the hotel. Perhaps twenty people are at small tables taking the *prix fixe* dinner. A papa and his wife and children, two or three couples, several single men. I notice them all subconsciously and soon slip away, low in mind and body, the future looming black and problematical. A less flirtatious mood could not have been produced.

Speedily finishing some packing to facilitate the early start next morning I am about to turn out the light when a rustling near the door arrests me. One always pays attention to subtle noises in the tropics. A folded piece of paper is being pushed under the door and a shadow wavers dimly behind the slatted upper half.

I pick up the note. Perhaps it is from Sturdza. I hope everything is well for to-morrow. On a single sheet of

## NHATRANG—THE RAILHEAD

white note-paper in blue ink, in the characteristic thin French handwriting, I read the following:

*Chère inconnue. Je suis hanté par votre sourire, votre charme, votre délicatesse . . . le sang me brûle. . . .*

*Pardon, Madame, belle inconnue, de cette brusquerie, peu chevaleresque . . . mes sentiments ne peuvent???. . . .*

*Le chaleur qui m'anime est semblable au rayon du soleil couchant.*

*Excusez cette phraseologie superflue mon cœur vous en attendt bien plus longuement.*

*Avec tous espoirs,*

*Chambre 23.*

*A.D.*

Incredulous I read it again, translating it unconsciously:

Dear Unknown, I am haunted by your smile, your charm, your daintiness. . . . My blood boils . . . forgive, Madame, beautiful unknown, this rudeness . . . so unchivalrous . . . my feelings do not permit. . . . The ardour which consumes me is like the blazing of the setting sun. Pardon this superfluous phraseology. My heart has been waiting for you much too long. . . . With all hope, A.D.

The second note awakes me from a deep sleep an hour later.

*Que dois-je penser de votre silence? Dédain . . . ou bien pudore feminine. (What am I to think of your silence? Disdain . . . or better feminine modesty.)*

## POISON ARROWS

*Je vous supplie de m'accorder un tête-à-tête de quelques instants. (I beg you to give me a few moments tête-à-tête.)*

*Dans l'affirmative veuillez donc allumer la lumière de votre salle de bain. (If you agree, please light the light in your bathroom.)*

Thinking back over the dinner hour, I recall a black-haired young colonial, perhaps in his late twenties, who had glanced a little oftener than the others at the unchaperoned female. This country seems to take sex in its stride, like eating and drinking. Its open mouth avidly seeking satisfaction. A paradise this for the frustrated one.

I hastily extinguished the light.

## CHAPTER III

BEN METHOÛT—LAST FRENCH OUTPOST

“**M**ONSIEUR *est fou!*”

It is four o'clock in the morning. I am nearly dressed and feeling very sorry for myself. A black wet night outside, some lukewarm early tea, unrefreshed by such cat-naps as the notes from my unknown admirer permitted, this bald statement by the room-boy, whom I had dispatched to call Sturdza, produces a desire to slay someone.

“Monsieur is crazy! What do you mean?”

“The gentleman in number twelve is crazy. He shouts at me and swears and flung a boot at the door——”

Not waiting to hear more, I throw on a kimona and proceed down the corridor. I knock in some trepidation and call through the door:

“Sturdza, it is time to get up.”

I repeat the performance. A silence . . . and then:

“*Bien, Madame.*” In the voice to which I am accustomed.

The jolts that this Hungarian gentleman can project upon my ordered world! My visions of more delay, of starting again into space alone, unprepared, and of many other tremors the unknown may hold for me, become more tenuous.

Much relieved I return to my rooms.

## POISON ARROWS

Four-thirty. The boy knocks and announces that the motor is waiting. I send him along to hurry Sturdza. The boy returns.

"*Monsieur est fou,*" again breaks upon my ears.

Dashing along to number twelve with the boy following discreetly, again I knock and knock and call loudly.

At last comes response. Profuse apologies follow. He had overslept. He will be out in a moment. Will Madame get into the motor and have the luggage packed in the back. He will follow in no time.

I bribe the boy to stay and keep the gentleman awake. In twenty minutes Sturdza joins me in the motor, eyes very wide, cheeks flushed, excited incessant talk, talk. By the time he has rung the changes on his apologies several times, we turn into a garage and stop.

"Sturdza, what is this? We are an hour late already."

"Ah, Madame. It appears we have to change cars. A spring is broken in this one. The man kept his promise to be there at four-thirty. I promised him an extra tip for that and he kept his word. He is a man of honour. Madame is pleased?" What a country! What a man!

As I have decided to remain my own bursar, silently I hand out the promised five piastres and as the first grey streaks of dawn seep through the slanting rain, I watch wanly to see that all of the impedimenta really is transferred. By five o'clock, huddled in coats and raincoats we start again on a sodden trip to Ben Methoût. The canvas top affords but little protection against the wind and wet, and none whatever against the steady stream of phrases from my companion on the back seat.

"The first big town will be Bien Hoa. It is also the last. By noon we should be on the edge of the Moï

## BEN METHOUT

country. "Madame," the tone changes from guide to personal, "last night, after leaving you, I went into the town—after I arranged for the motor I thought I would enjoy myself as a man should. But I could not. My mother, my wife—women like Madame—the 'congaï' does not—is not—— No.

"I took a pipe or two with a friend and came back. I listened at Madame's door. All was quiet. There was no light coming through the slats. When I was a little boy I used to listen at Mummy's door and make a little scratching on the side with my finger nail. If she heard and spoke to me, I could go in. Mummy was always so sweet. Once she took my face in one hand and ran her fingers through my hair with the other and murmured—'My George is tall. Almost to my shoulder. Soon he will be looking down at me, instead of up at me. And he will be a man and go away from me.'—I wept, Madame. It seemed so sad to grow up and go away from Mummy. I loved to have her pat my cheek when we sat together in the dusk before the lights were put on. Often she would not ring for lights until it was dark, quite dark. In her rich voice, quite low she would tell me things nice to hear.

"What would she tell me? Oh, fairy tales and little stories made up about us: I was always the Prince Charming to her. I never did any wrong or mean thing. We were always happy when she told me stories in the twilight. But she made me study and work hard with my teachers. She wanted to be proud of me—— She told me about women, too——"

When exhilarated by the drug, he is surprisingly frank; his words tumble forth like a page from Joyce's *Ulysses*. At other times, though always courteous, he is

## POISON ARROWS

extremely reserved, the censor well clamped down. Weary and miserable, I want to be at peace, to try to forget my pet interior python and this hum of words; but the buzz as of swarming bees still drones on—

"Mummy was not always happy. She was not Hungarian, you know. She brought me up English. Father had *noblesse oblige* of a long line but her ideas for me were different. There were ladies around the court, not very *comme il faut* and he was ugly when he had too much wine and especially when he took vodka, which he loved. I see it now. Mummy was often unhappy. She wanted me brought up like an English gentleman."

It was Mummy this and Mummy that—Mummy's hair was never mussed. Mummy's dress was always dainty—until politeness cracked. Too many jolts, too much Mummy—

"Oh, do be quiet and let me think."

An astonished, hurt silence. Soothed by the blessed quiet I begin to be more normal. I look back upon the white buildings of Nhatrang in the distance and at a fringe of green along the estuary where Song Cai seeks the sea. On its left bank rises a sleepy pagoda. Beyond it a village near some Cham ruins—junks and fishermen and the Isle of Tré around which the sea surges. The Annamese life here seems placid and the score of European residents live in open charming houses amid gardens rescued from the beach and bordered with aloes. But Nhatrang seems a melancholy and bored little city. Its beauty lies in the sea-washed high rocks that upjut fantastic shapes through the salt spray like those which I saw from my balcony at the Beau Rivage Hotel. I suspect that Moï land will make me even more apprecia-

## BEN METHOÛT

tive of that 'Imperial European hostellerie' patronized by the upper class Indo Chinese and by the trickle of foreign travel that finds its way along the Route Mandarin on the Annamese coast from Saigon to Hanoi, a stretch of eighteen hundred by no means comfortable kilometres. From Nhatrang we have been going through level fields. Occasional villages and little shops with cakes and fruit for sale break the monotony of the road as the cultivation becomes less and less.

Only a few moments for normal observations. Again the flood gates of speech from the gentleman on my left, open wide:

"If Madame does not wish to hear about my beloved mother, I will tell her about the road to Ben Methoût, when I was there five years ago. The road has been much improved since then.

"From Nhatrang to Ninh-hoa is thirty-seven kilometres. Do you see those small red crabs with one large claw making holes in the marshes, they are good eating. The last Annamese village will be Binh-Nguyen. The last station at Suoi-trinh is at foot of Annamese chain. Its peaks rise fifteen to eighteen hundred metres high. Behind is the mountain chain of Varella. Then will come the hill of Yok-Kao, fourteen hundred feet, but we cannot see it in the mist. From Suoi-trinh to M'lang is eighteen kilometres. In the old days of elephant travel there used to be a tram, or traveller's shelter, about every twenty kilometres, a day's march for the elephants. A tram usually consisted of two Moï huts, one for the Europeans and one for the natives and porters. They were raised on ten foot piles and were always surrounded by a high stockade to keep out the wandering wild

## POISON ARROWS

creatures and occasional hunting tiger or Mois on the war path.

"If the elephants began trumpeting it was a sign of Ong cop, the tiger, for elephants do not enjoy the hunting tiger any more than the other dwellers in the forest. From M'lang there used to be a tram at Barang on the river Song-Hine which often overflowed its banks and became impassable. But now we shall go over a bridge which has solved that difficulty. From Barang is a long stretch to M'Drak, about the half-way point to Ben Methoût and we should make it for lunch instead of taking a week as in elephant days.

"Here the Annamite mountain chain fades into the savage country. The road twists upwards through the ragged peaks that raise their heads four to five thousand feet. On the western slope it descends onto the high plateau of Darlac which stretches for hundreds of miles of forests and many rivers that seek the great Mother of Waters, the far-off Me Kong."

Sturdza's guide book phrases gradually stop like a running down phonograph.

Silence at last, profound as the gloom and dankness, pervades the back seat.

By noon we had been on the road nearly eight very long hours, about one hundred and fifty miles. The Baron is hunched in his seat, pale, yawning, speechless. A steady drip of rain as the cold increases with the altitude. The driver and his helper, who needs must be taken along in spite of all our luggage, for the sole purpose of conversation and horn-blowing, now become much excited.

"What is the matter, Sturdza?"

## BEN METHOÛT

"We are approaching M'Drak, and they want to stop."

"Of course we will stop. Is there any hotel for lunch?"

"No, Madame, but there is a general store. We can get beer and sandwiches."

"But Sturdza, you said no need to bring lunch, we could get it at M'Drak."

A shrug of the shoulders. That was early this morning, when all was rosy, the future not bothering him. I am learning about my guide. His psychology, like the country, is unpredictable.

"There is a French Administration Poste here. But we have no letter to the commandant. He may not be here and it would delay us at least three hours for *déjeuner*."

Again on the road but little solaced by the scanty hospitality of M'Drak, we crawl our way over two mountains and emerge upon the beautiful uplands of Darlac. The coarse greenish yellow grass common to the region grows eight and ten feet high; is good cover for the doves and pigeons, marvellous for panther and tiger. Wild elephants breed in this beautiful rolling country dotted with palms and hardwood trees, the forest in the background and behind the mountains blue-draped with clouds. In the patches of high forest the red gibbon is at home. I glimpse two of them and hear their queer call, as we move along at a better pace. A gorgeous peacock crosses the road and very large anemones splash pink clusters. Colour, life abundant, overflowing streams, workable land—the many tribes of Moïs scattered over this area for hundreds of miles, had a goodly heritage

## POISON ARROWS

until civilization, striking French banners, began blazing its path of progress.

In the Library at Saigon are painstaking records of the heroic methods that the pioneer French officials took to subdue these aborigines of this rich country, the Moïs, also the more advanced civilizations of the Annamites and Cambodians. They follow the pattern of all conquest by absorption. I recall voluminous documents in Washington that show none too creditable transactions of the American government's dealings with the North American Indian. This is not a book on ethics and no one has ever contended that the process of conquest is pleasant to the conquered. Nor, in this case, to the conqueror. The French are not so happy in their colonization of Indo China as in Africa. Nervous from the climate and isolation, too many have succumbed to drugs and drink; carried on in veritable hell. Hating and despising, being hated and feared. Asia avenging its own.

Some ugly tales seep through about the methods used by certain French Officials to colonize their little brothers the Moïs. I give only one of these that Sturdza related from hearsay. A certain governor or Resident, on the edge of the unsubdued country, was trying to train a group of Moïs for military service, each man prevented from running away by a light leg iron. The French corporal in charge of the squad was found dead one morning, a poison arrow protruding from his body. The Resident lined up the Moïs and threatened instant execution of every man unless the culprit was identified. As this produced no satisfactory result, he made it known that they would have to draw lots and whoever drew the

## BEN METHOÛT

fatal number would suffer the penalty. The one who drew the unlucky number was then declared the murderer and ordered to dig a hole, six feet long, three feet wide and six feet deep. This done, he was placed beside it and *bang*, was shot into it. It is rumoured that this discipline was employed upon several occasions, and once for an attack upon the Resident himself, of a suspect whose guilt was not proven. The strain and constant menace of his job in the steamy jungle may have snapped sound judgment. These stories, of which there are too many for some of them not to be true, eventually reach higher authorities and the official is transferred—for his health.

One of the great administrators was L. Sabatier. His account of the swearing allegiance to the French flag by a large number of Moï Chiefs presents a more pleasant picture. In my notebook at Saigon I had jotted the following about the Ceremony of Touching the Bracelet, which bound certain of the Moï tribes to French allegiance. *Les Palabres du Serment en Darlac* on January, 1929, at Ben Methoût shows a yearly conclave since 1923 of those chiefs who, by touching the bracelet, took the oath to France that they would not be outcasts (*insoumis*) but protected in their rights and customs and welfare. It was politely made clear that to refuse the oath meant death while acceptance meant peace and honour. The names of the chiefs on this occasion were Ma Chuc, Ma Drah, Ma Rim, Ma Sing Ni, Ma Lak, Ma Prin, Ma Son, Ma Trenh, Mang S'Rong, etc. Those tribes of Darlac who participated in this ceremony and subsequent feasting were Rahde, Kpa, Adhams, Krungs, of the red earth country; the Black Blas, the Bihs of the Swamps,

## POISON ARROWS

Knongs Riam of the big lake (Tac Lac); Mnong Gar of the River Mole; the Mnongs and Mnangs of the elephant country; Mnongs Lach of the mountains and the bamboos.

Suddenly all interest in the notebook vanishes! The brakes are screeching as they precipitously slow the car. Bump! Bump! We have run over something.

I peer out of the celluloid window at the back, and lose balance as the car spurts forward.

"Stop! Sturdza, make them stop!" As he does so I hop out to look upon a large python writhing in the road; coiled like a huge pancake, the tyres have broken the spine in several places. Visions of a snakeskin bag and slippers, then very smart in Paris, appeal to me as souvenirs.

"Sturdza, ask the driver to cut off that large unbroken section. I can skin it later."

"Better not, Madame. We are late and—"

"And what? Surely there is no danger. I will do it myself—"

"Ah, Madame. No danger to them but you—it is tabu. The helper is a Moi. News travels fast even in this country. You might find it hard to get what you want—later. They believe in the *nangats*—ghosts, you know."

Something unpleasant is emanating from the front seat. Ominous low tones, a menacing hunch to the helper's back.

I return to the motor; we drive on, leaving the potentially lovely bag and slippers to crawl away and die. I register my first tabu in Moi-land.

At dusk we stop to verify the road from M. Louis

## BEN METHOÛT

Lucan, a colonial planter, a few miles away from Ben Methoût, who hospitably insists upon an apéritif. Mme. Lucan loans me a little book on the Moïs which I have not seen. Charming people wresting a living in these torrid backwoods.

The Bungalow Nicot seems a haven when the scattered lights of Ben Methoût at last twinkle in the blackness. No hotel available, the Nicots, out from France for past ten years, besides running the only store for general merchandise, occasionally accept a paying guest, when the rare traveller finds himself adrift in Ben Methoût. One such, M. Antoine Ballestrier, French, the large blond type, is occupying the guest room. He obligingly relinquishes it and accepts a couch in the salon-dining-room. Sturdza seems quite content with a low platform in the great barn of a room called the store.

"Indeed, Madame, I quite like it. One always uses a wooden bed for the pipe and at night, no one will disturb me. It will be quite comfortable."

Said Mme. Gaston Nicot, at a late dinner of pheasant, Chinese squash, *French wine*:

"The Annamese coolie is a robber and a liar. They thieve my strawberries, do what they like and are very slow. The Moïs are honest, especially away from the contamination of Ben Methoût. In the bush you can leave your cartridges and even money around."

The Nicots are kind, the only really kind people, except the Lucans, I am to meet in all that Moï trip. The few officials are polite as the French always are. They are not lacking in courtesy—extend such as is definitely indicated in the Government permits—only that subtle something which flows from cordiality is lacking.

## POISON ARROWS

Perhaps it is due to the arid psychology of the country. Nowhere else have I happened to encounter it in many years of wanderings, among many nations.

Madame Nicot, a *petite Parisienne* in her late thirties, whose dark eyes hold sadness, whose lips speak always gently and often gaily, offered me the use of her bathroom with a porcelain tub and plenty of cold and, when arranged, hot, running water, perhaps the only one in Ben Methoût. I revel in it; bless bath salts, perfumed soap, eau de Cologne, and all the toiletteries. No Roman bath could have been more mollifying. Weeks have passed since the last really satisfying oblations to the god of comfort at Hong Kong. Relaxed, in slippers and kimona, I emerge to be stopped by M. Ballestrier, standing in the door of the salon which is now his bedroom. In red and white striped pyjamas he is beckoning me to enter.

"It is hot to-night? Madame is much refreshed? She will perhaps enjoy a glass of champagne?" A quart bottle and two glasses are on the table. The bed is gleaming with embroidered linen!

Ye Gods, does the Frenchman never stop hunting! It is not the woman, but himself, he loves, the demonstration of his own sex.

I fence: "Ah Monsieur, how charming! But, I am desolated—fatigue is too great—" I edge towards the veranda and to my own room beyond, which is separated from his by a door that does not lock.

"But Monsieur le Baron is deep in his pipe," came a disappointed voice. "He will never know; and these tropic nights—one gets a little lonely—Yes?" No use to correct his inevitable conclusion.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RAHDES—FEAST OF THE WATER GENIE

THE days at Bungalow Nicot are crowded with preparations for the plunge into unexplored country and short trips around Ben Methoût studying the Rahdes, one of the Moï tribes. Some of their customs are modified by contact with the foreign world, but not many.

Sturdza introduces one of the chiefs whom he met last trip. MaLak, quite a dandy in attire, has three wives. The chiefess, of course, is a Rahde, one is an Annamese, the third is a Laotian. The Moïs are professedly monogamous. Polygamy is allowed but is not common. A wealthy man can take another wife if the first wife consents. Each of MaLak's wives has a house. I visit the Rahed Chief Wife. Photograph her and the daughter, give a present of a silver bracelet.

We are invited to attend a big feast at Buon Kor Sieng, a Moï village three kilometres away. A *boire la jarre*, as the French call the ceremony, is being held to propitiate the water spirits. This drinking of rice alcohol from a jar has been going on for three days and will last for five or eight days according to the wealth of the village.

MaLak speaks some French. Questioning him I jot down an assortment of information from which I deduce that during a propitiation ceremony the Rahdes, but not

## THE RAHDES

Mnongs, change their clothes and that bananas will be an acceptable present to the Water Genie. Common people cannot eat bananas except at a feast after they have been offered to the Genie.

If a woman dies MaLak tells me that her husband is bound to marry one of her sisters or near relatives, and vice versa, for the widowed chiefess must marry in her husband's family, a brother, uncle, nephew. A girl may be married at puberty. Often at twelve she asks for a husband. She is expected to marry the man her parents choose for her but if she puts up a fight against him they cannot force her. If there are no children one must be adopted, girls first, boys after. There is no infanticide. Abortion, yes, but no infanticide. Abortion, often by witchcraft. The witch presses the child out of the abdomen, gives potions, etc., but no infanticide. No polyandry, no perversion of sex, not passionate. Men and women—no evil is said of them. Very peaceful, rarely fight. Never with the chief present. There are more males than females. No murders by poison, only through witchcraft.

Tobacco, everyone uses it. Opium—a shrug—a French shrug from this Rahde chief. My questions take another tack.

Yes, beyond Lake Taclac are the unsworn insoumis, people who have not touched *le bracelet du Serment*. Sometimes they go to war. They use the cross bow and the flattened tips of the arrows are poisoned. The voi voi, a creeping rattan vine, has a poison so virulent that a deer shot at a hundred yards will drop instantly. At Taclac there is the painted mountain, 'Mother and Child,' and no white men at all. In one direction, to Ben

## POISON ARROWS

Methoût, east north-east, it is sixty kilometres. In one direction is Dalat, south south-west, one hundred and sixty kilometres and to the north four hundred or perhaps five hundred kilometres (a journey of three weeks' sleeps) are the unsworn, and to the west are the unsworn.

From MaLak also I learn a few words of Rahide, which many of the Moïs use. They will be useful for the wild country. Special words for the elephants are Trung (kneel), Ngha (go) and Ding (careful). M'rang (pirogue or log canoe); Ching (gong); Hgor (tamtam or hide drum); Rais (rice); M'ne me (woman); M'nic, era (young girl); Cheh (jar); Mnam (alcohol, drink); Mnam k'pie (rice alcohol); Sang (house); Anue (floor of split bamboo); Chur gap (wall or roof made of grass); Enam prong (log cut with steps for stairway).

I ask about the tribal government in this matriarchal regime. MaLak's ideas are that the chief takes his title because of marrying the chiefess. The woman reigns morally, but the man takes command for providing and for battle and danger. The women are feminist because they do not need the men. They own their homes. But when there is danger they rush for protection. Before going to war, in certain villages the warriors dance the sword dance and the shield dance as they do in honour of a funeral or a feast, and the sorcerer kills chickens and spills the blood on the warriors' arms to give them luck. If a very wealthy village, a cow or bull or water buffalo will be killed and the blood is wiped on the crossbow to bring good luck. But there is not much magic.

The life of the village is communal. About marriage the chief says:

"When two young people agree, the boy makes

## THE RAHDES

presents to the parents. He gives the mother a kind of dowry, a paddy field, a cow, a house which in that case no longer belongs to him even when the young people set up housekeeping in it."

Usually the family keeps united in the mother's home. Several generations sharing in it. The young people live very closely together until marriage. When a daughter enters matrimony a separate room (occasionally a house) is provided by her family, as she inherits the property and the forthcoming children live with her. The parents share the education of the children and usually spoil them. The husband lives with his wife more as a visitor, still having a right at his mother's family home. He may also at times live in the bachelor quarters of the old men.

Unaccustomed to such cross questioning, the courteous chief shows signs of fatigue and ends the interview with a promise to conduct us to the feast next night when some visiting chiefs will be present.

M. Ballestrier, whom Sturdza and I encounter at the home of the Acting Resident when we pay a diplomatic call at eleven o'clock and sip an Amer Picon, is very agreeable. During *déjeuner* at the Bungalow Nicot, mellowed by good wine, he offers to escort us to a Rahde funeral at the house of another chief. He manœuvres a seat beside me and is subtly active with his knee and ankle. I strive to please so long as amenities keep within the bounds of innuendoes and hygienic sanity.

We three set off after the noon siesta in good spirits. Baron Sturdza is gay and excited and talkative. Ballestrier is moved to gallantry. He grips my elbow while walking along the road, sends an explorative finger under the short sleeve. Of sidewalks there are very few,

## POISON ARROWS

mostly around the military compound. Ballestrier tells stories of my lord, the tiger, on several occasions emerging from the jungle and continuing his stroll on this very sidewalk. We pass the fountain where good water (potable) is brought from a spring. A congaï, slim, not quite young, in the Annamese long black coat and trousers, stands by the fountain rim, watches my two companions pass. Her lips, under the straw pancake hat, twist enigmatically. Ballestrier nods slightly, Sturdza stops talking and looks straight ahead. Later he asks Ballestrier, in French as B. speaks nothing else:

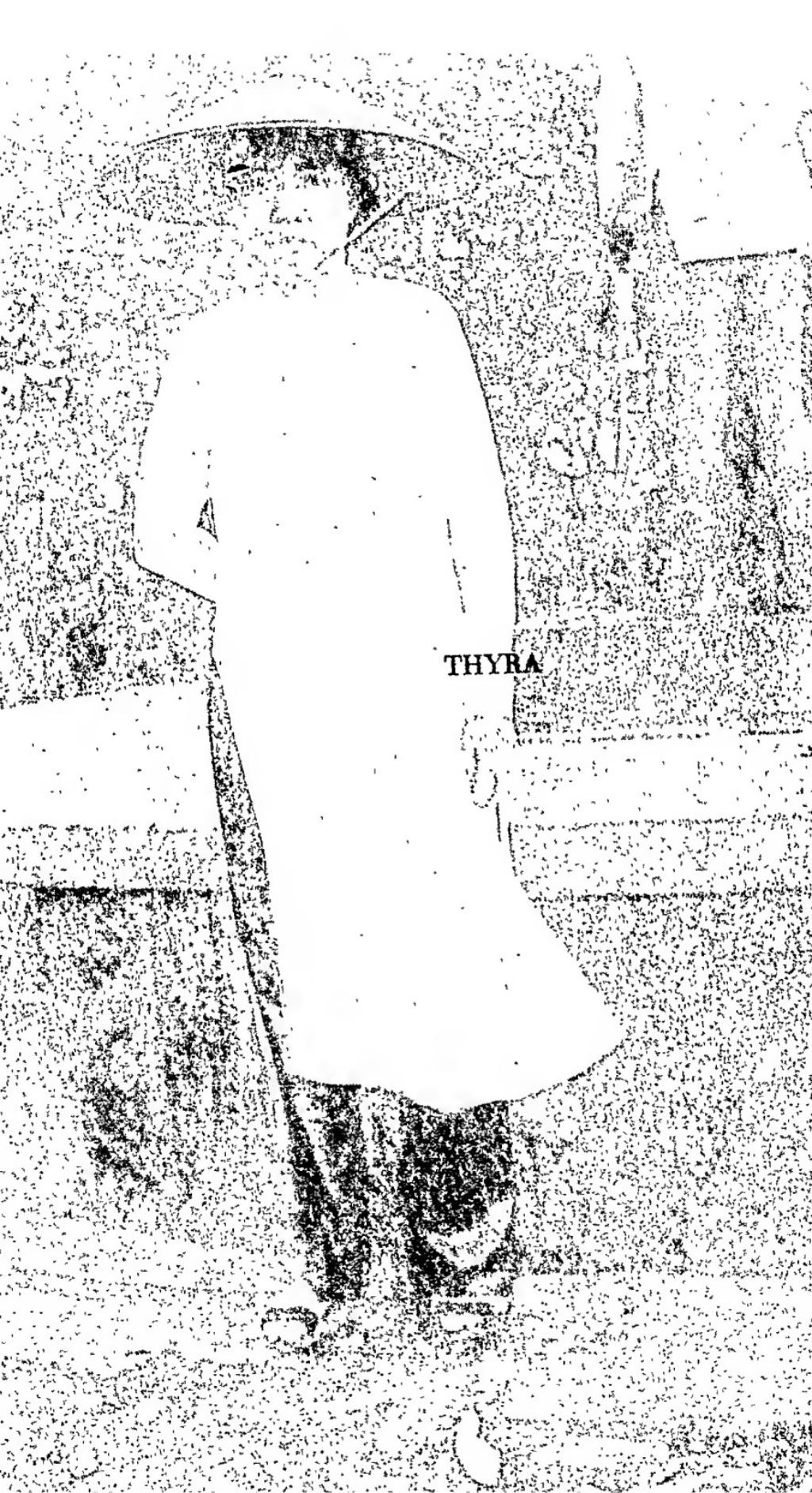
"Wasn't that Thyra? I—thought so. I—I knew her here last time. She has grown old."

A shrug from Ballestrier: "One cannot be particular here."

The age-old game of hare and hound—well, two can play at it. Soon the lady exploratrice, apparently absorbed in making notes and taking photographs, is left quite alone by the French gallant to avoid the ruts in the road.

Sturdza's rapid speech now has full swing. He contributes a bit about the Rahdes.

"The savages have a lot of endurance. Look at the way they file their teeth! I heard a story of fortitude last time I was here. In the old days the girls used to congregate at the fountain at sundown—they still do sometimes—and of course the boys came too. The belle of the tribe had many suitors. She laughed at them all. One young buck especially pursued her. He was not well-favoured. A fall as a child had twisted his back and he had ring-worm. She refused him with scorn. He pursued his suit. One day at the fountain she flung at



THYRA



## THE RAHDES

him: 'You silly rabbit! What would make me marry you? When you come to me with red ants' nest in your mouth, ask me then and I will marry you.' All the girls and boys laughed at him as he slunk away. But several nights later he appeared amongst them carrying something on a long stick. When he got a few feet away he stopped and put the thing in his mouth. It was a red ants' nest. Even before he could reach the girl and mumble out his devotion, the poison from the ants had swollen his mouth and nose and eyes."

"Heavens!" I exclaim. "There is nothing so torturing as those ants. Go on!"

"The girl married him. She had given her word before everybody. The boy was very ill for a long time. But when he recovered she took him. 'I will at least have a brave man for the father of my children,' she said."

We arrive at the chief's house where the chiefess' aunt awaits burial. With difficulty I climb the Rahde stairway, a split log fifteen feet long and fifteen inches wide. The notches are cut at angles more suitable to a naked foot than a shod one. I am arrested by a pair of woman's breasts carved in full relief upon the top of it. A sign of plenty I am told; and if the family has much store of baskets and gongs sometimes a second or even a third pair of breasts is added to denote great opulence. The planks are not attached to the platform against which they lean but can be drawn up at the least hint of danger, like the draw-bridges of feudal days.

My escorts remain with the chief in the outer room. I notice here the village drum, a huge affair resembling a barrel of stretched rawhide, often suspended from the ceiling for greater ease of playing at ceremonies and

## POISON ARROWS

feasts. There is a huge hammer of wood used in booming it. Next to the tom-tom, also suspended at convenient heights for striking, are the village gongs, large, round metal discs of varying sizes, very dear to the heart of all. Along the centre of the ceremonial part of the house, near the square guest platform, are the village pride and joy, the great Forty Thieves' jars of pottery in which the rice alcohol is made. The concoction is drunk on every possible occasion. The *boire la jarre* ceremony is for the Moïs radio, talkies, theatre, contract bridge, all in one.

I am permitted to enter the women's quarters where a corpse wrapped in a red cotton blanket was laid out on the rattan floor. A group of women, girls and boys are squatted around it wailing a death chant. Seated on the floor cross-legged is a beautiful young girl, slender thighs covered with the Rahde woven blue cotton skirt, torso nude, straight as a young sapling, with curved breasts like large globes of amber grapefruit. The girl's lips are firm and full and red. Her face smooth and well-favoured, eyes half-veiled in decorous grief. Smooth, luxuriant hair, blue-black, is knotted on the left side of the well-set head in a great loop with ends hanging from it to show that she is a maiden, that is unmarried. The long, slim fingers are busy making a design in small white flowers. Two white blossoms are stuck over the left ear.

A youth of adolescent age, perhaps fourteen, changes his position. Squats on his heels close behind the girl, who is four or five years his senior and passing his hands under the girl's arms he cups her breasts and negligently plays with them. Softly he breathes on the nape of her

## THE RAHDES

neck, one side, then the other. He does not kiss her. He appears to be subtly enjoying the performance while he continues to join his falsetto note to the minor dirge.

The recipient of these casual attentions also continues singing minor and weaving the garland. Nobody seems to notice anything unusual. The quick and the dead—the lusty sentient boy and girl, kneeling over the still figure under red cotton!

Suddenly the girl's face and neck is suffused with a deep blush. She gives a low, sharp exclamation. The boy is loath to stop. With another sharper exclamation she shakes him off, without halting in her weaving of the garland in her hands. The boy drifts away. The circle of mourners continues as before; the wailing of one woman whose job it seems to be, is more persistent than the others.

The chiefess who now appears in the doorway of an inner room beckons to me to enter. In the centre of this small room a tiny charcoal fire is built upon some stones and serves to keep the rice pot boiling. The stones act as support for the pots and hold the heat and are laid upon a simple firebox of hard clay, two or three feet square. At the back of the house, which is raised about the usual ten feet, is an open platform, similar to the one in front. This is reserved for the women and family life. The wall is hung with a few implements used for their daily routine, a back basket, winnowing tray, bunch of rattan, bundle of cotton. On the floor rests a loom, more baskets and a crude spinning wheel.

I return to the large room where the corpse is. Soon a Wise Old Woman comes in, mutters some strange words over the form of the departed one which is then put in a coffin without nails, carried to the spot selected

## POISON ARROWS

and laid in a shallow grave, where the sorceror, or Witch Doctor, casts small pieces of silver into it for the deceased to buy the good will of the Chief Evil Genie. The anger of the Genies is often shown by terrifying apparitions. In fact, ghosts play a definite part in the Moī life.

We all follow the procession to the burial place.

The Rahdes are mound builders and believe the spirit of the dead survives. Because of this belief, a long bamboo tube is now placed over the mouth of the corpse and held in position by a heaped-up mound of earth fifteen feet high. A spirit table will be built on top over the tube, through which the dead will be fed for weeks, perhaps months. All the relatives feast and 'mnam' under a specially built shelter nearby.

MaLak, the chief, explains that when the time comes to cease feeding the dead, another *boire la jarre* will be held at the mound. With gongs and music, the bamboo tube will be closed, the dead one told he must thenceforth look out for himself and the mound will be deserted. Sometimes when trouble comes, some loved one ill, the spirit table may be again supplied with food offerings to propitiate the spirits of the dead.

We leave the strange company. We pass a Moī squatting under a tree. He is naked, save for a loin scarf. A Moī axe is hooked over his left shoulder; a small bundle lies beside him. He looks up at us through a shock of dingy black hair; his lips part in a toothless smile as I photograph him. Later I discover the reason for this apparent toothlessness among the Moīs.

Glancing at the cloth in which the bundle is tied Sturdza remarks:

A RAHDE CHIEFESS ON HER BACK PORCH

**COLONIAL BOUND**

## THE RAHDES

"He is not a Rahde. His blanket has no blue in it. He is not a hunter; he has no bow and arrows. Probably he has travelled a long way in the bush from some other tribe."

We soon pass a back veranda where a woman is looping over several poles great wet hanks of cotton yarn. She has just dipped them in a big pot of boiling indigo and when the thread is dry will wind and weave it. Doubtless she has already spun it from the cotton balls she herself has picked from a field in which her household has a proprietary share. The Rahdes, long ago discovering the use of indigo as a dye, now cultivate a few fields of it.

This young woman, evidently familiar with the camera, tosses her head with a distinctly saucy expression. Though her face is not as good looking as many of the Rahde women at Ben Methoût, her body is erect, firm and slim.

I am beginning to realize that my preconceived idea of women under a matriarchal system must be modified. There is no complete reversal of customs and although the women own the property and the children and are custodians of the tribal authority, they do not 'wear the pants'.

The men of the household have the job of providing food and shelter and protection from enemies whether humans or animals.

The whole system is primarily communal. Each sex has definite labours which it accepts, but both sexes share in the life and obligations of the household and the village.

It appears to me that the authority of Moï women,

## POISON ARROWS

even the chiefess of a tribe, is not so great as that of the illustrious Mother of the Household in the old-style China. The Chinese Old One, whether she were mother or grandmother, in the old days, and even yet in the back country away from the Treaty Ports, had almost supreme power over the family household, even to the matter of decreeing life or death.

I cannot find here any such respect for woman's authority. Her power comes from being the titular owner of the property and progenitor of children. There is no enslaving control of one class over another as is too often the case under our patriarchal, capitalistic rule.

As the young people live together in the family house until marriage, undoubtedly a certain amount of casual mating is practised before marriage. The communal habit keeps the family united in the mother's home. Several generations often live in it.

When we near the Bungalow Nicot, M. Ballestrier sends Baron Sturdza off on some pretext and invites me to 'afternoon tea'. I accept, wondering where such might be forthcoming in this place that seems barren of shops. Soon we stop at an Annamese house on the usual stilts and climb some real stairs, past a small room on the ground floor with a tabac and R.O. (Regie d' Opium) sign at its door. We enter a large room furnished with glass windows, a few rattan chairs, a table with old magazines, a decrepit phonograph and a small bar. It is known as the club. A handclapping produces Thyra, she of the withdrawn eyes. My host gives an order for two dry sherries.

After polite circumlocutions, I gather that the gentleman would like to accompany the lady into the wilds,

## THE RAHDES

solely for her protection. However, he would not in the least object to seeing the tiger country. Would not think of asking a salary, just food and the like. It is much too wild for a lady. Better have two escorts, one at least a strong man and a hunter who has been in Africa.

I listen to some raw tales of jungle blacks. But unfortunately my ability to understand French increases. When Ballestrier's second sherry is finished this unfruitful approach is abandoned and the buttons come off the foils. He suggests a rendezvous. I refuse the bout and lose a friend, if I ever had one in this peripatetic Frenchman.

We return to the Bungalow in cold silence.

The next night and nearly the last in Ben Methoût, while Sturdza and I are waiting for MaLak to take us to the Feast of the Water Genie, my guileless guide announces that Ballestrier has been trying to secure his good offices with Madame to be invited to join the little expedition into the bush on the morrow. He would help protect Madame——

"Yes, and he wants to shoot a tiger and is a wonderful hunter—— Do you like him, Sturdza? Do you trust him?"

The answer is a shrug. That continental shrug, meaning anything according to the facial expression that goes with it—— No. Yes. I do not know. Maybe. It is false. It is true. Most assuredly the man is a liar but I do not say so. That diplomatic shrug, a lingua franca, speaking louder, and a good deal safer, than words.

"You have not spoken to me, Sturdza, about this. Remember, I know nothing about such a request. We will take our chances alone."

## POISON ARROWS

The fascinating event of the evening crowds the disquieting Ballestrier from my mind.

With lantern and flashlight MaLak brings us through the black night for half an hour. We hear a stirring rhythm of gongs. This grows louder, until we climb the log of the chief's longhouse at Buon Kor Sieng and become part of a weird ceremony to propitiate the Water Genie.

In the crowded interior three bamboo torches flicker orange circles through the gloom. Many half-naked figures are moving quietly about. The split rattan floor bends and creaks under the tread of their feet. Words, if any, are spoken in low tones. My flashlight flickering in various directions reveals figures stretched on wooden benches along the right wall under sloping eaves of grass thatch. Other figures—visiting chiefs—are cross legged on a raised wooden dais, covered with a ceremonial blanket reserved for distinguished guests. Ceremonial blankets are spread along the wall to accommodate the overflow of dignitaries. Nearly everyone is smoking. Beyond, the gloom reveals in the direction of the domestic quarters a group of women and children; among them on a blanket squats the chiefess, smoking a clay pipe of tobacco. The group is constantly shifting—women and men leaving, others coming, all without undue noise. This has been going on for three days and will continue for another three days or longer if the village supply of rice alcohol and foods holds out.

It is a big *boire la jarre*. A dam has been built by the strong men down at the bend of the river. Food and drink are being offered the Chief Water Genie that his minions will give good water and not crack nor tear

## THE RAHDES

down the dam; that the heavens will open to fill the rice fields with life and growth when the young plants need it.

On the ceremonial side beyond the guest places is spread another blanket of finest weave. It is the banquet table for the Water Spirit. Upon it is the blackened head of a bull, roasted complete, the horns and eyes, ears, tongue and brains, a red flower in each nostril. Around the head on leaves are choice portions of the animal, its hoofs, entrails, and tail. Also fruits and rice.

In the centre of the longhouse, under the lambent flames of the torches, range seven great jars, their glazed brown barrels reflecting the high lights of golden cheer. They are the focus of the feast. They contain the 'booze', rank rice alcohol, sucked through a long bamboo tube, each tube manned by a valiant drinker. When one has his fill for the moment of the fiery liquid, he relinquishes his drinking seat, a small bamboo stool six or eight inches high, to the next claimant. Each jar has an acolyte squatting beside it slowly feeding it water from a gourd. This is often replenished from a long bamboo container originally filled from the Water Spirit's domain near the dam. As each man draws off his desired amount of drink, fresh water has to be supplied to the fermented rice mash in the jar so that the good work of propitiation can go on.

From time to time a chiefess takes her turn at the tube and then draws off a gourd full which she takes to the group of women hovering in the shadow. Only high ranking women drink from the jar directly. The crowd is noticeably well-behaved. No loud talking, no sign of inebriated excitement. Boom, boom, goes the great drum—clang, clang, in rhythmic beats sound the gongs.

## POISON ARROWS

Shadows move about in the dim torch light. Some are prone under the eaves 'sleeping it off'.

As the night wears on, a ceremony takes place. The Chiefess of Buon Kor Siengm clanking her bracelets, is conducted to a drinking seat by an old man, the Witch Doctor. Muttering incantations, she puts the bamboo tube to her mouth, takes a few swallows, crouches in front of the Water Spirit's Banquet, while the old priest, the pholy, murmurs prayers and offers the bull's head and other delicacies to the Genie, a strange scene of sepia and shadows.

It is indicative of the matriarchal customs of the Mois that the chiefess is functioning, not the chief. This is too vital a task to be done by any but the spiritual inheritor of the tribal honour. The planning and labour of the dams was the chief's responsibility. Propitiating the Earth, Wind, and Water Spirits is another matter. Boom! goes the tam tam—bong, bing, bong! go the gongs rhythmically. On the dais, chiefs and wise ones nod dreamily to the music's peculiar barbaric tune, short notes, long notes, almost syncopated.

Several times a day the chiefess performs this ceremony. Several times daily for as many days as the feast lasts. Ultimately the food thus offered to the Water Spirit is eaten by the ever changing groups of men, women and children attending the feast. They eat the squares of raw meat and less sanctified food heaped on rattan trays. In true communal fashion everyone shares. One set of water drippers relieves another at the jars. The drinking goes on steadily, quietly. Burnt bamboo flares are renewed by green ones that better hold the pitch pine oil. Fresh players separate like shadows from the

## THE RAHDES

dark to man the gongs. Sometimes they are women, if for the moment there are not fourteen available men and boys to keep the music going. No singing, no dancing—a silent crowd. The gong music always the same air but changing tempo, according to the mood and occasion and the players.

In this hidden jungle of Indo China, great swelling clangors beat against the velvet blackness of a tropic night, endless rhythms trailing upwards to the twinkling deep blue bowl.

## CHAPTER V

### TRADING—A DJARAY ENCAMPMENT

SOME Djarays appear this morning at M. Nicot's trading post. I am doing a family wash on the back veranda and all the water that I have is in Madame Nicot's pail. Sturdza comes out of the store, which is an extension of the veranda and all on the ten foot level. He is still sleeping on one of the counters and beats a retreat when these Mois arrive to trade. I toss the soapy water to the pigs below and go in to see these representatives of, to me, a new tribe.

The Djaray chief, a well-built muscular chap, is wearing a blanket over his shoulders and in his hair a comb made of bamboo, ornamented with a rough design in lead. Some copper bracelets and anklets and his gee-string complete the costume. He has a pair of deer horns for which he wants to get some tobacco and salt. He is mightily intrigued by some sugar-covered chewing gum which I offer him and finally ventures to try it. The experiment is not an unqualified success and soon the accustomed betel is substituted. A French chocolate bar which I try next is more appreciated.

Sturdza learns that there is quite a large encampment of these Djarays about a mile out of Ben Methout. They live in the north and have just arrived. They are to have a feast to-night. We arrange to attend.

## TRADING

The Djarays are somewhat higher in the scale of civilization than many of the Moïs tribes. They know how to work in copper and lead and have some vocal music. At last night's feast the Rahdes had no songs and no dancing. But always every Moï village has gongs.

At any *boire la jarre* anyone can boom the tom-tom with regular strokes but it requires some skill to play the gongs. As the number of drums, pipes and jars, show the financial status of the Moï village, it is poor indeed if it has not at least a Chinese gong. This is called *mâla*, in full *mot mat mâla*. I examine one at the store. It is shaped like a large placque rounded and turned inwards. Before the French levied a tax upon them, a gong cost about twenty-five piastres. Now it is smuggled by the Annamese traders and costs forty to forty-five piastres. An official commenting upon smuggling, says it is curious to note that the Chinese gongs do not appear to come into the country by water; at least they do not appear on any invoice sheets from abroad.

I learn that the gongs from Tonkin are like the Chinese gongs except that they are sold in a group of three, a big one, medium and small with a difference in each of four centimetres. They are called *côn* and the combination of the three gongs when struck makes a harmonious resonance characteristic of the Moï music. This is called *mot bô-côn*, that is rhythm of *côn*. A *bô-côn* well-chosen for sounds costs more than a *mot mâla*. The value lessens if the diameter of the gong is less than sixty centimetres and increases in value as the diameter increases. In the centre is a round raised spot ten to fifteen centimetres in diameter which is struck with a padded hammer. The Moïs love these gongs so well that they

## POISON ARROWS

exchange much ivory for them and even occasionally an elephant.

In the early days of the French occupation, the equivalent value of a Chinese gong and a Tonkinese set of gongs was a rhinoceros horn, ten to fourteen kilograms of ivory or a kilo of betel. A good horse or two ordinary horses cost about the same price, from fifteen to twenty-five piastres; an adult elephant fifty to eighty piastres, which were also payable in gongs. If a Moï tribe has not the wherewithal to buy what its members want, they will quite unconcernedly go into temporary slavery, giving their labour to a richer tribe which acts as intermediary and assumes the debt. M. Nicot is of the opinion that the Annamese trader if he trusts to this arrangement frequently does not get paid.

This month of January, I am discovering, is the favourite time of the Moï year. The storehouses have rice. It is the dry season and the hard work is over.

It is good to rest after labour, and to visit a little and to joke and laugh with one's neighbours, even to go on a far journey. With lance on shoulder the Moï goes to market, perhaps he leads a mare loaded with tobacco and other stuff for barter, the skin of a water buffalo, the horns of a deer to be exchanged for a cake of wax, or a coil of copper or other long coveted purchases. Sometimes a matriarch goes along and returns with her back basket stuffed with household things.

Occasionally a Laotian trader finds his way to the out villages. Sabre in belt, he supplies the betel nut luxuries, and tobacco and now too often opium, and goes away with skins and horns.

## TRADING

It is in winter the high wind comes at twilight. Unrest lives in it, and the urge to slip away to the next village—if the omens are good. If the staccato note of the little lizard, the gekko, sounds *gok ti, gok ti*, that all is well, a journey may be undertaken.

In the vast green tomb of these native forests as the sun's blazing dims into greying gold and greens, the melancholy hour of twilight drapes a deepening silence and night falls in a grand calm of nature. The eternal and endless green of the forest stretches on and on to—where?

The Moï mind goes no further. This desert of desolations is big enough for him as he travels the trails away from home.

Another favourite article of barter is salt. In fact it is a necessity, although there is a substitute from the ashes of a plant called *yam kam*. The Annamese farmers, during the yearly pilgrimage of various tribes which come into the plain of Darlac to trade, charge seventy to a hundred per cent for salt, depending upon what barter is being offered and the time of the year. During the first four months of the year the price is lower. Beads for hair ornaments and the most prized copper for bracelets and necklaces are also in demand. The Moïs sometimes have to offer for exchange *graines de ricin* (castor oil seeds) maize, rice of good quality and rattan cane.

Occasionally a Moï has the good luck to find a betel nut tree but he seldom keeps it long against the ravages of the elephants, and the Chinese trader soon has control. The practice of chewing betel is too ancient for us to know who introduced it but the story of the opium is recent enough to fasten upon these bartering visits. The

## POISON ARROWS

expense of the feasting at these times is borne by the Annamese farmer.

By this limited trading in the winter certain merchandise finds its way into the interior and the opium traffic has been introduced. The Moïs embrace it with a veritable passion, "which," says a French official, "does not help their reputation for unreliability and bad character."

This perhaps is a dominant race judging a subject race which does not and will not conform to its standards. I am beginning to wonder if the Moïs are not peaceable and honest enough when allowed undisturbed possession of their customs and beliefs—and their lands.

It is also in January that the chiefs of the Djarays and many other tribes go visiting and much feasting and *boire la jarre* and music of gongs rolls through the air. A rich chief may go as far as Ninh Hoa with an elephant pack train to get salt or a new set of gongs, his retinue spreading out along the trail.

After his meal of rice cooked in a tiny brazier over charcoal, he camps at night on the hard ground with no covering other than a cotton blanket. If by happy chance a village has been reached, his body is warmed by alcohol and he is comfortably satisfied with some of the favourite feast food—a cow's or bull's head with special delicacies of the eyes, head, nose, and tongue, and intestinal mixtures chopped up and placed on leaves. No part of the exterior or interior economy of the beast is neglected.

The feast of the Djarays to-night is in full swing when Sturdza and I arrive and are ushered courteously to a seat beside the chief near the rice jar. The company of a score or more squat informally around us. A few

## TRADING

torches light the smooth indigo night. The turns of drinking from the jar goes on as usual. There is no shelter, no convenience. A small fire built for the evening meal is expiring. Near it, leaning against a tree, are several back baskets, lances and axes.

While I am waiting for something to happen, Sturdza remarks that he is finding the Moï dialects quite easy, much easier than the sing-song intonations of Annamese. The vocabulary is small and the r is rolled; often a half whistle is given on half-closed lips.

I find isolated words not difficult but cannot understand running sentences. We discuss the word Moï. It was originally the Annamese pronunciation of the Chinese word for Man. On the Boloven plateau further north than where the Djarays live, up near the Laotian border, these wild people are called Kha which signifies mean or barbarian. They were probably of Malay-Polynesian origin. Certainly the Moïs, although they live in the midst of Indo China are not Chinese in type. They have straight hair, olive skin and moderately curved lips. The nose bridge, straight-set eyes and larger body barrel bear out the tradition of a remote ancestral migration. These ethnological thoughts are now interrupted.

Suddenly to my delight I see a young Adonis, with no more clothes than the bronze statue he resembles, step forth from the shadows and sing a love ditty. A young woman also rises and takes her part in the duet by singing the fourth and fifth verse:\*

\*The translations are by L. Sabatier.

## POISON ARROWS

(*He sings*)

O graceful young girl, young girl light of foot,  
whose mouth speaketh seductive words,  
O young girl, let us content in amorous discourse;  
Let us exchange the token bracelets: thou shalt  
give me thine and I will give mine to thee.

I desire thee, if thou art slim as the stem of the bamboo,  
If thy hands and thy feet move as quickly at thy  
work as the trenchant knife.

Then shall I give thee my heart, then shall I mingle  
my breath with thine.

Then, be thou assured, shall I love thee.

All my treasure, the turban of black silk falling on  
my shoulder, the turban a fathom long binding my  
forehead, all the garments I possess—of little  
concern is it to me if I lose them all, so thou wilt  
have me.

(*She sings*)

I fear that once the rice is eaten thou wilt spurn the  
pot, that as soon as the vegetables are consumed,  
thou wilt throw away the bowl.

I fear that if I become big with child, thou wilt  
abandon me; I fear that thou wilt then flee away,  
to the country of the Bih or to the bark-clad  
Mnongs.

## TRADING

(*He sings*)

Why should I discard my knife? Why should I lay aside my lance?

Why should I abandon my wife in the most beautiful days of my youth?

It is magnificent. These impassive, nearly naked savages in this savage spot under the soft scintillating canopy of indigo, their voices responding in a lover's dialogue, carries romance to the heart. These dignified Djarays are the most intelligent and proud of all the Moïs I have met.

Presently another tall youth bursts forth in song. Sometimes his lips are closed and only a plaintive wail escapes. Sometimes his full-throated tones are like clanging gongs.

O young girl, young girl so beautiful,  
O young girl, I desire to live with thee!  
O young girl, wilt thou have me?  
We two will live together.

I go to the east, towards Black Mountain;  
I go to the west, towards Kling Mountain;  
I go from east to west, searching the young girl.

In thy house are many people; we might be discovered.  
But when thou goest for water, I shall wait for thee  
on the bank.

If I am there before thee, I shall wait for thee.  
If thou art there before me, wilt thou wait for me,  
O young girl whom I desire?

## POISON ARROWS

The young girl who seems to be the object of his impassioned appeal receives it stolidly with no evidence that she could be the vestal lamp to light such a flame.

It so happens that we are to participate in a pronouncement by the pholy. A recent funeral has occasioned a dispute as to the disposition of the possessions of the deceased who was a woman of importance in the tribe. From what Sturdza gathers from the chief's explanation, it is a laying down of the ancestral law, the Bidoué. The old priest, with outstretched hands commands reverent attention; he stands erect and recites the law in solemn tones.

As it appears to be similar to the one L. Sabatier has interpreted upon another occasion I give it as a high light upon the underlying basis of matriarchy surviving among these primitive people.

Copper bowl in hawk's nest, copper bowl in 'kney's' nest.

Baskets, wallets, small objects—you should keep them, you, eldest sister.

*(The eldest sister now becomes the matriarch of the household.)*

Calabashes, ash-baskets, sharpening stones, wood for utensils, dyeing-brushes, of wild boars' bristles—you, eldest sister, should keep them.

Precious pots hidden in the swamps, gongs, jars, pretty articles, valuable articles—to you, eldest sister.

## TRADING

Riding-horses, elephants, slaves, buffaloes, pigs, chickens—to you alone, eldest sister.

Servants and slaves, the young girls and the young men, shall labour with you in the field, eldest sister.

The bananas, the yams, the rice you shall divide with your sisters, eldest sister. The entrails of the buffalo and the flesh of pigs you shall divide into equal parts, eldest sister. Small pots, small calabashes, objects worth one 'dah', divide among your sisters, you, eldest sister.

Without dispute, with no outcry. Do not leave one another. Do not separate. Live together. Otherwise, small or great, weak or strong, will be lost. Give aid to one another. . . .

The company is very quiet as each listens to the recital of the ancestral law pronounced in measured accents.

One other scene closed this strangely moving session of Djaray life.

A man on the long march of two weeks has caused trouble by slanderous remarks. The evil maker is hauled before the company for judgment. After some discussion the chief calls upon the pholy to administer the reproof. This he does in no gentle manner. In ringing tones he hurls at the culprit the anathema of the Bidoué.

His mouth calumniates. He slanders with long teeth.

## POISON ARROWS

Deceiving bamboo—one thinks him smooth, and he cuts. He wickedly seeks to cheat the world. He slips a liana round the neck of peaceable folk. He puts hindrances in the way of good men.

False cotton-plant with worm-eaten heart, jar that leaks—he wishes us to believe that smallpox and ‘piang’ menace the village.

He defiles the honourable girl, offends mother and child.

This is evil, and there is an account against him.

The accusation that he slanders with long teeth, shows him to be a coward and a poltroon who had not been ‘brave’ enough to have his incisors removed. It is one of the strongest of opprobrious epithets.

The women on this occasion mix with the men, but I can see no one person I can identify as the chiefess. If she is present she is taking no special part. Perhaps when we get among the tribes in the jungle I shall understand better about the Moïs women and the part they play in this human drama that has been enacted for ages in these wilds of Asia.

## CHAPTER VI

### BONNE DEUN—FIRST NIGHT IN THE JUNGLE

STURDZA and I finally left the comfortable Bungalow Nicot one morning bound for still wilder parts. Through the jungle bush for sixty kilometres a space had been cleared and the forest floor is level enough to negotiate with a motor.

At Bonne Deun, on the edge of a rushing river, we arrive late in the afternoon and unload our little Ford that has brought us to the end of the jungle track and into the palisaded compound of a tram. From here we must depend upon Moï carriers.

The first news is that the elephants we are expecting to get here are missing. Where, oh where is our transportation for the morrow?

I decide to pay an explorative visit to the queer conglomeration near by of thatched huts on stilts, humans and mingled odours of pigs, chickens, and offal which proclaims a village. Sturdza shrugs his shoulders politely, which I interpret as a wish that I would not be so fatiguingly active after the long trying day from Ben Methoût. Meeting no response he sets about collecting a flashlight and as escorts two Annamites, the guardian of the tram and his assistant.

At the outskirts of the village we are met by a savage gentleman attired principally in a gee-string and a long

## POISON ARROWS

bamboo pipe; the chief, it appears. All three tongues aclack in a mélange of Annamese and Moï put Sturdza more or less in possession of the reason why the village elephants are missing. Some imperfectly understood message drifting along the jungle trail the day before made the chief decide that the beasts had to go as far as they could to Ben Methoût. That accounts for the two dejected quadrupeds we passed in the forest. Fortunately that was not very far away. I urge that a runner be sent after them and perhaps by travelling from dawn on the morrow—of course they will not travel at night—they might still be able to get back in time to cross the river and take us at least to the next village. Much discussion and volubility results in what I hope, without any assurance but my faith, will be the furthering of this programme.

We are definitely out of the Rahde country. The colour of skirt and taste in beads and front stairways are different. A certain pertness and sophistication of the Moïs around Ben Methoût is reverted into the simple manner of the savage that is frankly suspicious or trusting and indifferent.

By now dusk is about to drop with its usual suddenness. Discretion, firmly enforced by Sturdza, dictates a speedy return to the comparative security of the tram. He unnecessarily points out that this tropic world is not friendly—the very air seems charged with unknown insects, snakes, even humans. I stay long enough to mount the ladder of the chief's house and converse by sign language with the chiefess. She is enjoying the cool of the evening in her back porch, the same being a portion of the resilient bamboo flooring that is not walled nor

## BONNE DEUN

roofed. Here she weaves and winnows and does household tasks. A bamboo reel for carding the cotton is hanging on a peg in the house wall. Also a carrying basket and a flat shape for winnowing rice.

She has been straining her eyes to come to a stopping point on a skirt she is weaving. It is a weary task, this weaving on the Moï loom. It is a primitive affair. She is sitting on the floor, legs wide apart and straight out, the soles of her bare feet press against a piece of wood about a yard long which holds the woven strip of cloth in place. Another bar across her lap is fastened to one that passes behind her back. This makes a stretched-out frame that leaves her hands free to ply the shuttle back and forth. The cotton of the cloth in the loom is no longer the Rahde blue but is in stripes of two shades of brown. The chiefess, about four feet six inches, sturdily built, black hair combed back, dark eyes, snub nose, heavy underlip, rises and peers at me through the gathering gloom. What is her feminine appraisement of my riding togs, light hair, blue eyes and white skin?

Sturdza is at the ladder below: "Madame, the chief has presented you with some rice and an egg for your breakfast, and the trail is not safe in the dark."

I descend. "What about the elephants?"

"Hmn! The chief appears to be doing something about it. Time will tell."

Arriving at the tram without mishap, the palisade gate is opened for us and firmly shut again. I climb the house ladder to a strange scene. The usual one long room is already fully occupied by nine Annamese men squatting about in their long black trousets and loose skirts. It is a party of two surveyors and their helpers who are

## POISON ARROWS

about to make the first map of the immediate vicinity. Subsequent experience with an inadequate map that was furnished me from the Colonial Office indicates how necessary is some accurate charting of the region for the befuddled traveller who may venture into it.

A stale smell of tobacco, opium and food pervades the apartment. Not a chair or table, not a stick of furniture is in evidence except in one corner, a camp cot surrounded by a dingy mosquito net. A coarse brown blanket and greyish rumpled sheet of rough cotton are visible through it and—Oh intriguing Asia—a small pillow with a befrilled and embroidered pillow slip of fine French linen, as incongruous as a diamond tooth in a crocodile.

The surveyors are solemnly presented to Madame by Sturdza and conversation languishes, their French and my Annamese being of the same sketchy variety.

Too tired to eat I ask Sturdza to make some arrangement for me to rest. Perhaps equally weary and still hoping for an early start, he does not wish to disturb my bedding in the luggage piled outside on the platform, thus causing delay in the morning. He holds a lively parley with the head surveyor. I sit on the floor in as dignified a huddle as fatigue will permit, for ‘White prestige’ must never be questioned.

Soon Sturdza approaches, cheeks slightly flushed and with a bow announces that Madame is to take the surveyor’s bed.

As there is absolutely no privacy, I sneak out of the farthest door onto the open platform ten feet from the ground, into a wild black night of wind and cold rain and not daring to go down the ladder, perform necessary

## BONNE DEUN

toilet arrangements with chattering teeth and hustle back into the crowded odorous interior.

Very politely I say good night to Sturdza and to the two surveyors who are in a group apart from the other Annamites, and repair to the camp cot and the comparative seclusion of the mosquito net—heavy boots, jodhpur breeches, *solar topi* complete. The sickish sweet odour of the poppy comes in suffocating little whiffs from the frilly pillow—and other queer little odours. The whole bed exudes an Asian aura. I light a cigarette. Strange how we each prefer our own smell. Wrapped in my own travelling rug I turn off the chatter of alien men and drift into unconsciousness.

Suddenly, hours later, about 3 a.m., I am startled to attention by a sharp staccato crash and

“*Parbleu!* I’ve broken it!” Sturdza’s voice in French.

It was the glass bowl of his opium pipe, which at the moment in my ignorance did not concern me much.

The three are having an early morning smoke together. I watch them furtively as they roll and smoke four pipes, bright eyes, pink cheeks, excited talk, snapping of fingers, occasional winks; only Priapus might follow their brain buzzings. Then three or four more pipes and the mood changes. Each makes himself comfortable on the rattan floor and passes into the enjoyment of his special visions.

What new angle is this that grins at me in a Moï hut on the edge of an untamed country! Terrors born of the night and the alien creatures so near; in unrestrained attitudes of dreams.

All normalcy and security is gone. An ominous world, weird, uncanny envelopes me. I hear the grunt of a sow and squealings from her piglets on the ground

## POISON ARROWS

under me as they root in the banana skins and other food scraps that had been pushed through the floor. The low note of a rushing river, the Da Ricou, fifty feet below the cliff upon which the tram is placed, suggests, how are you going to get across that swollen flood and with what kind of a broken reed are you going into an unfriendly, unknown region of tigers, snakes, savage peoples?

I shrug. If only I can keep fairly well, let the god of chance rule the rest. Drowsing, the fantasy of the night recedes.

My next punctuation into consciousness is five o'clock, dawn; the day has begun. On a charcoal brazier in the far corner the Annamites are preparing their morning rice. Steaming hot tea in a tin cup, soft boiled eggs, the chief's present, cooked by the guardian of the tram, bring a certain satisfaction; later increased by the welcome noise of our elephants arriving.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON THE TRAIL AMONG THE UNSUBDUED MOÏS— ABOUT ELEPHANTS

A GREAT to do in the compound about seven proves to be Professor Gallet, a scientist from Saigon who has been collecting orchids in the vicinity and is availing himself of our little combination of loose nuts and bolts to take him back to Ben Methoût. He has been travelling since dawn, as his Moï boy knew by jungle telegraph that some strangers had arrived at the outpost.

Sturdza and Gallet fall on each other's necks in true French fashion, they having worked together in the Colonial Museum. Envously my guide, interpreter and possibly friend, helps the very draggled professor, whose ragged shirt, sneakers and shorts give evidence of considerable punishment while pursuing his hobby, the orchids. As they move his booty into the Ford, masses of orchids spread over the hood and fenders and bulge from front and rear seats, twisted greenery starred by dozens of exquisite blooms. A fortune for a florist in New York, if he could have had them to put up in glazed boxes with silver ribbon. Two pairs of eyes gaze at the plants lovingly with the look of a collector, a lover; no sordid merchandizing soils their joy in these treasures.

## POISON ARROWS

"I have some beauties at home," exclaims Sturdza, "and I will get some marvels now, perhaps the rare butterfly orchid." His thin hands work nervously like a miser grasping gold, as he watches Gallet vanish down the forest track, his vehicle looking like an animated section of the jungle itself.

More concerned with getting ourselves and our impedimenta with its elephantine transportation across that wicked rolling current at our feet, it is not until several days later that the real significance of Sturdza's remark comes home to me.

Two long narrow pirogues made from hollowed out logs are drawn up on the bank and several Moïs are coaxing three reluctant elephants down the steep clay cliff into the water. Each beast has its own driver or comac astride its neck, busily prodding the pachyderm's head with the sharpened end of a heavy stick. Not one of them wishes to enter the water.

A big scrimmage ensues during which protesting elephants, a dozen Moïs, our strewn-about luggage and leaky pirogues make a mad scene.

Atlast Lomuot, the biggest beast, lives up to his name (friend) and allows himself to be urged into the swiftly moving river. Once in he stops trumpeting and applies his mighty strength to swimming three hundred yards against the current and manages to land on the opposite bank perhaps a hundred feet further down stream. Encouraged by this example the other beasts are manœuvred across and we embark in a frail craft with the rifles and my personal kit. Flat on the bottom of this hollow log we sit in an inch of water, Sturdza hugging the weapons and I safeguarding the cameras. A Moï

THE  
SCHOOL OF  
THEATRE  
(part of the College in centre)

## ON THE TRAIL

boatman at each up-tilted end does wonders to keep us afloat.

Several trips get our stuff transferred and by another hour it is loaded onto Lomuot and I am invited to mount another creature who will have none of me.

Of course it is a temperamental female, I had met the type before in India, but better trained. The behaviour of a well-bred pachyderm belonging to a Maharajah's stable, accoutred with luxurious howdah and trained to take only such steps as are most agreeable to the human on its back is a very different thing from these Moï mountains of iniquity.

Grimly, I climb up this creature's front leg, her trunk turned in the opposite direction and into a contraption made of bamboo. It is a square cage not big enough to allow of anything but sitting cross-legged, Buddha fashion. For American legs ten minutes is completely satisfying and ten hours is an endurance test of considerable magnitude. Add to this the irritating gait of one's half-trained mount, supplemented by individual vagaries such as hitches, twistings, nibbling the tail of the preceding elephant, insistence upon a certain place in the convoy, behind or in front of its buddy, and the monotony of the unpleasant becomes almost unsupportable.

At times the beauty of the scene conquers all darker thoughts as we go through a tangled forest draped with liana and heavy masses of dendropholous plants; its deep gloom punctuated by yellow and mauve sprays of phalaenopsis and other orchids—little breaks of colour like fleeting smiles on a sombre face.

Threading through all the incidents of the trail, humid forests, overhanging creepers, rushing brooks and placid

## POISON ARROWS

shadow, are the pleasing hollow notes of the Moï bell. It is suspended by a rope of rattan around the elephant's neck, and is made of a length of bamboo, split sideways from which hang two little bamboo hammers. It accompanies the march with rhythmic clacking strokes characteristic of the country.

A tropical deluge now descends upon us—belated, for it is the dry season. It provides such additional discomfort that all else is forgotten. The heavens do not rain temperately but seem to open and pelt tons of big drops which no fabric can withstand. Soaked to the bone I watch the weird pictures of the other elephants in the convoy like grey ghosts travelling through the water curtain.

My own beast, covered with grey spume, flounders and plunges from one foothold to another, leaving deep holes of whitish mud that slowly close into the slime of steep slippery banks and running rivulets. At times the terrible red earth of Darlac, sticky and vicious, clogs the feet. The torrent grinds against the rocks, branches crack and thunder claps, lightning rends a tree. It stuns the brain with a wild fantastic symphony of destruction.

At a wet gulch which has brought my mount to a full halt, Sturdza, with his rifle, comes alongside. Unable to endure the tortures of his elephant, he is walking; by no means an easy promenade, owing to the wet places and rough ground, the logs, brambles, ditches and all kinds of duff on the forest floor. Also, with rifle in hand unceasing alertness of eye and ear is necessary to discover first the lurking tiger or python.

Events arrive without warning in this country. One must be ready.

## ON THE TRAIL

I am watching Lomuot, the leader in this batch of elephants. Having decided that a certain descent into the gully is possible, he slowly tests the height of a log and heaving his right fore-quarters to the necessary height, hoists it over, then comes an upheaval of the left fore-quarter. His load angles perilously as the hindquarters go over, one at a time. A grunt as the comac prods him down the slippery descent and he meets another log over which to heave his mountain bulk. There is a great creaking of bamboo ropes which hold his load in place as he humps his mighty muscles in a series of jerks up the opposite bank, his comac cutting a passage through overhead vines the while.

My female watches this performance, mills nervously from one foot to the other and the human on her back is not enjoying it either. It is our turn and we go through it, rudely. These Moï elephants, I repeat, have none of the elegancies of the Rajah's transportation. I look back to see Sturdza heaving about on his mount, he having decided even elephant back is better than walking.

The deliberation of the elephant is past belief. A mile and a half an hour is good going in this kind of travel. In the open places where the grass grows eight or ten feet high, if one is following a native track one can make three miles an hour. Twenty-five miles is a good day's march.

Elephants look as though they could carry enormous weights but a hundred and fifty or at most two hundred kilograms, three hundred to four hundred pounds, is maximum. They are temperamental, very sensitive, easily fatigued, gadflies and mosquitoes drive them crazy. They need a bath morning and night and after a march

## POISON ARROWS

must have a day or two of rest so that they may feed unhampered. They require an enormous amount of food a day and several barrels of water.

Until I encountered the elephant travel in Indo China I thought the last word in slow and torturing transportation was a bullock cart in Assam. But this travelling cage of short bamboo rods fastened sketchily to the enormous back by bamboo thongs is an instrument of anguish surpassing all experience.

Fortunately, it is in one of the open stretches that my female elects to give me further discipline. It is in the blazing heat of mid-afternoon. Every muscle is shrieking for rest from these incessant twistings and pullings of adjustment to Moï travel, when my elephant rears on her right hind foot and turns a mighty pirouette in mid-air, all three legs waving madly. Three times she does this in rapid succession. In vain I shout trung (kneel) and ding (careful). I can only cling desperately to the cage and hope that the bamboo thongs will not give way and send me hurtling ten feet to the ground. The comac perched on the neck of my transportation abandons his habit of control by simple pressure of the knee in the direction desired, jams his legs deeper into the twisted rattan collar and belabours unmercifully with his stick the sensitive spot behind the huge flopping ears. The bamboo bell on my beast's neck rattles and clacks like a demented thing. One of the other Moïs rushes up and grabs the trunk that is wildly waving in the ether, brings it down and rubs it gently. The creature calms down. What on earth has happened? Apparently out of a peaceful moment! I am to know later. As life calms to monotonous discomfort I endure it with some thank-

## ON THE TRAIL

fulness and reflect further upon these great pachyderms that in the animal world rank tops for intelligence.

The Moï elephants, as savage as their masters, seem possibly as intelligent. They are caught when babies and trained, save the mark! At Kontum is an elephant market where the prized white elephant, which comes from here, occasionally drifts through, destined for the royal stables of Bangkok or Pnom-Penh. A strange and unique commerce to arise out of this wild country.

Among the Mnongs, there are ceremonies of ratifications among buyer and seller and the elephant demands that the buyer shall deliver to the seller all his household goods, even cooking utensils and the scanty frock of his wife. The elephant's new master must give all in return for protection and must eat no elephant steak. If anything is withheld the elephant feels that he is going to a stingy man, resents the insult and may withhold obedience to such an unworthy master. No one must thrust hand in the rice jar, lest the elephant thrust in his trunk for a like purpose. Nor should one gather fruits or tobacco while walking through a village or a vegetable patch, lest the elephant swing her long trunk right and left and gather tempting products from the neighbours and become a marauder.

The first day the elephant comes home care is taken not to remove the bracelets lest he should think he could slip his bamboo anklet and rope that moor him to the home compound. Sometimes there is a dream alliance, which seems to be a psychic tie between the elephant and one who has a dead loved one, a father, son or daughter.

Something interesting is coming along the trail. We are in an open grassy place, the forest rimming darkly

## POISON ARROWS

beyond. Three women and four men nearly naked appear from nowhere. They are carrying huge packs of firewood in their back baskets. The crooked sticks tower above their heads, leather straps cut into their shoulders from the weight. They draw off the trail into a silent group and watch us pass.

The women are not well-favoured. Their sturdy bodies, with hanging breasts, trudge along on short legs. Their faces are wrinkled, eyes dull, hair unkempt. Not at all like the Rahde women or the Djarays or the chiefess of Bonne Deun.

No friendly greetings are exchanged. My elephant boy murmured something that finished with 'M'nong'. I infer that these people belong to a tribe not quite friendly with the people at Bonne Deun.

In the magnificent gloom of the forest where the sun never fully penetrates and the vegetation is always humid, the jungle fever lurks. One dares not sleep the night in these glories of palms, vines and lush vegetation through which huge trees tower to a far sky. I hope for a village soon, even though it is futile to speculate upon what kind of a reception may be accorded to us when we come to an 'unsworn' village. Sufficient for the moment are the tribulations thereof. I return to the subject of elephants.

MaLak has told me the elephant likes his liquor. Often he is given the rice mash of the alcohol jar when finished and a change is made to a new one. I wonder if intoxication affects him the same as man. He often acts crazy enough to be drunk. The cause, however, can usually be traced to some jungle happening about which my dull senses have not informed me. The elephant has a good

## ON THE 'TRAIL'

memory and a sense of obligation and revenge. He will take a great deal of punishment along the line of training and discipline but any act which outrages his elephant *amour-propre*, such as abusing his sensitive trunk, will be remembered and even though months have passed retaliation will follow.

Another hour drags by. Sturdza is again on foot, comes alongside: "There is a village, they tell me, not very far away. Shall we try to stop there for the night? I think we can keep these elephants for another day if we do. But the Moïs will not go further away than four days from their own village."

My eager acceptance of this plan is lost in the suddenness of my female's gyrations. Again, without warning, she is doing an elephantine can-can and I am hanging onto her back exhaustingly. When she has been again soothed, I urge Sturdza to try to fathom this disconcerting variant of her full bag of tricks. Through one of the Moï boys who speaks some Annamese, having been at Ben Methoût for a time, the reason for these demi-volts discloses an interesting olfactory item. The *elephas asiaticus* does not like the effluvium of *homo americanus*. This female of her species is definitely objecting to the smell of a female of my species. This Moï-trained elephant does not like the strange odour from her back which a vagrant breeze wafts to her. That odour is new, startling, un-Asiatic. In plain words it is American—mine! Racial and national arrogance makes us believe that while we often notice such indelicate matters in others, our own must be agreeable or at least neutral. Asiatics have a different odour from Europeans, yellow races from white or from black. I do not wish to smell like

## POISON ARROWS

a Moï even if racial development had made that possible. The Moï elephant and Moï ponies definitely indicate feeling the same way about me. Not once during my contact with the Moïs could I get near enough to one of their shaggy equines to attempt a bareback ride. There you are, and there is nothing to be done about it, except to keep an elephant's trunk near the ground and hope that the sensitive smeller will fail to pick up whiffs of Geurlain's bath soap, Lotos Bud cold cream or even just me.

One pleasant thing comes out of this. I engage Mhos, the lad who has helped with the interpreting. He is a gentle dark-faced youth, with limbs sculptured like a Greek bronze, he wears on his head a blue cloth twisted like a turban with ends loose on either side. On each wrist a bangle and around his waist the usual cloth with loose end in front. In his middle teens, he is now at the maximum of his mental as well as physical development. The intellect of the Moï has a rapid growth up to maturity, as though nature hurries the business of getting the young into a capacity for fending for itself as she does in the animal world. The few French Officials and missionaries who have written about their contacts with various Moï tribes have all commented upon the actual deterioration of the mental capacity after fifteen years of age. The French, in trying to utilize these primitives for military service, have learned to 'catch them young' and not to expect their *petit frères* of any age to bear responsibility beyond the adolescent capacity.

Mhos, as I soon discover, proves to be a very indifferent cook, but can boil water, reduce rice into a gluey mass, is very agile with a can-opener and fairly



## ON THE TRAIL

skilful packing and unpacking the supplies. Sturdza finds his greatest use in translating the Moï phrases into Annamese and the reverse. The first occasion for this is an adventure which soon comes upon us.

About five o'clock my comac mutters Ben Youk, which I understand means we are approaching a village. Soon a group of warriors appears ahead, each with axe and crossbow and quiver, doubtless full of deadly poison-tipped arrows. Evidently the jungle telegraph has warned of strangers approaching. The warriors advance rapidly, sixty strong, in battle array!

Being on the first elephant and some distance ahead I obey my intuition. Ordering the comac to stop, I dismount and alone approach the advancing array.

At least it is comforting to hope that these people are true Mnongs, and not a mixture of the tribes of the south, the Sadangs and Salangs, who have the playful zoophagous habit of devouring their enemies killed in combat—especially the lungs and liver. These delicacies eaten in the raw, give greater strength to the similar organs of the conqueror.

What to do! I have no precedent, no books, no information to guide me. When the warriors see only one queer human advancing on foot they hold back and the chief continues alone.

We meet in the middle of a grassy glade beside a small bit of water. The chief has a puzzled expression, rather stern. I hold out my hand and smile. For an instant he debates this action and then breaks into a quizzical smile and presents a loose, unresponsive right hand which I grasp. The act of handshaking is unknown but the friendly intention is clear.

## POISON ARROWS

His left hand holds a bamboo pipe, several inches of brass wire are wound around wrists and ankles; a gee-string, sticking through which at the right side is an extra strip of woven cotton (to cover his bare torso in case of chill), and a wisp of white cloth twists around his head. He has discarded his cross-bow. Prudence, or habit, makes him keep the battle axe, his trusty weapon of attack and defence, hooked over one shoulder. I have already seen the wonders of skill that are performed with this one implement, the Moï axe which every Moï has and seldom parts with.

There we are, the chief and his first 'Far-Off Woman' in the middle of an uncharted country, with no language but the 'speaking of our hearts'. What to do next?

It is Sturdza's turn and nobly he does his part. By now arrived and descended from his elephant, my interpreter swings into action. Surrounded by a group of the warriors and with the help of Mhos, he inquires if we can be accommodated for the night with a clean hut, if we can get elephants, what the condition of the trail might be for the morrow. This 'route colonial' which streaks a thin blue line through an otherwise white unsurveyed map is indicated 'passable in the dry season', but we are already finding that the French attempt to extend communication in that region has been abandoned.

Yes, there is a new house we can have for the night. No, there are no elephants, but at Yen La possibly. How far is Yen La reveals that it is 'further North'! Never do we get definite information in Moï country. One travels to the North or to the West or whatever direction it may be. One goes as far as one does go for the day, depending upon the spirits and omens, the weather and

## ON THE TRAIL

trail conditions. One stops at a village if it is friendly, or one camps in the woods.

We ascertain that the trail to Yen La is open and dry. The little group of humans drifts away.

We remount. After about a quarter of a mile we arrive at a bamboo house built in the usual Moï fashion high from the ground. I climb the ladder and take possession by squatting on the front platform. The elephants are unloaded and depart, perhaps for ever, but I refuse to pay for them until another day's march, and hope for their reappearance shortly after dawn.

The one room, though small, is clean, occupied by only a few spiders. My bedding is placed in one corner, the blessed, protective mosquito net adjusted over it. Sturdza dumps a rolled blanket in another corner, apparently all the bed he intends for himself. Long habit of lying on hard wood while taking his pipes makes the floor an acceptable couch. A battered suitcase of his, unopened, is piled with the other luggage.

"Where is your kit, Sturdza?"

"In my pocket," tapping it, "all I shall need for the night—a toothbrush, a comb, and some dross—"

"Dross?"

"Yes, Madame, the paste that is left after smoking. Since I broke the glass of my pipe last night, I must manage with the dross. At least, it takes less time. A few nibbles of it will do the same as several pipes. And I am cutting down, you know."

"But—but, Sturdza, how long can you manage on the dross? Perhaps we can send a runner back to Ben Methoût!" This vital question was dismissed with a shrug.

## POISON ARROWS

"Madame, I—I don't know. Don't worry, that is my problem. See, I am stronger to-day. Never could have walked the trail like that in Saigon. The fresh air and exercise, you know. I shall try to keep it down. I shall not fail you, Madame."

It is the European gentleman speaking, product of a long inheritance of polite and mannered ancestors, even husky ancestors with that Scottish strain through his mother. The problem is not alone his, however. I realize with chagrin, how inadequate I am to meet the exigencies of this trip without this one frail hyphen between civilization and primitive wilds; especially for interpretation. If I cannot contact the minds of these people the purpose of my being here at all is lost.

Useless to say more. Useless to combat with common-sense argument, the visionary optimism of the addict. I too shrug shoulders.

"What shall we have for dinner?"

"Ah! Madame is to have a fresh egg. The chief has just sent it and several handfuls of rice for the 'Smile Woman'."

"What a charming custom! We must send him—what do you think?"

"Mhos says he would like an empty tin can or two. The Mois prize tin and tin foil. I took away the tea from him just in time to save the wrapper. Madame might add one of those little mirrors for the chiefess. News travels in this country and it may help in the next village."

The deputation departs with these gifts. Mhos makes comment that the chiefess will never see the mirror as the men are as vain as the women. Later I dispatch him to the chiefess with some beads and a bunch of turkey

## ON THE TRAIL

red cotton. Neither of these gave much pleasure, as the beads are not the ones in use by the women in this particular village and they do not weave with red thread.

Mhos sleeps on the back platform to guard himself from the marauding wild pigs or possible tiger and to guard our luggage from over-curious visitors. Sturdza and I establish a mental barrier in our bed-time routine, as there is no physical one. Chatting ostensibly with Mhos outside he waits until I am secluded within my mosquito drapery, flashlight out, then without removing much of his clothing, adding a sweater for the 'winter' night is cool, he wraps himself in the blanket, takes a nibble or two of dross and presumably lies down to pleasant dreams. About three o'clock in the morning I hear him groaning and twisting about. Again quiet, doubtless some more nibbles of the opium. About five he arises and goes outside. I proceed with a toilet which leaves much to be desired by a luxury-loving body.

Praise be. The elephants return about six o'clock. The breakfast of coffee, biscuits, porridge and some precious oranges is eaten. I prepare a lunch of some dried apricots, sandwiches made with marmalade, cheese and soda wafers. Also Mhos fills a canteen with weak tea. Experience in tropical countries had taught me the precaution of boiling the drinking water at least twenty minutes and cutting the pallid taste of it with some flavour. Sturdza declines to have any meal prepared for him. He puts several lumps of sugar and a half-dozen prunes in his pocket, which already bulges with a small-boy collection of string, rocks, knife, a little chlorine for the water, if he chooses to drink on the march, his precious dross, extra cartridges, etc.

## ON THE TRAIL

heard these big apes on the high plateau of Darlac, I search among the branches for a grey figure swinging by its powerful arms, legs tucked up, a tailless rear, its human face fringed with grey hair, but the forest is silent. Perhaps I am mistaken.

Suddenly, the raucous scream of a peacock cracks through my senses, swooning with tropical heat and fatigue. I look back. The pack elephant is close behind, with no Sturdza!

I order halt and wait.

Unreasoning fear grips the solar plexus. The agreement is that the convoy keep together. So many things can happen. Ten minutes go by in leaden silence. The elephants begin to be restless. Mine, a silly old male who will not travel unless the pack animal, a buddy, is frequently nipping his tail, begins waving his trunk high in the air, a gesture that always bodes trouble of some kind. The comac gives him a little sharp stick discipline. He indulges in *sotto voce* elephant talk with his buddy. Doubtless they know all about what is happening.

Another ten minutes drag by. I am getting really uncomfortable, debating a return on the trail. What can have happened to Sturdza?

Another interminable ten minutes goes by. My mount holds himself still. One ear flaps a little. The comac says something unintelligible to me. Afar off is a movement in the bush.

It soon proves to be Sturdza's elephant and he on it, with Mhos walking behind carrying a large green bundle. Now it is easy to see that Sturdza in his cage is guarding a similar bundle in his topi, bareheaded, risking the noon-day sun, adding the very real hazard of heat prostration.

## ON THE TRAIL

hunting tiger not fifty feet away as I lay beside a small window in a Moï hut.

Kop! Kop! shot through the night in staccato notes. Kop, kop, further away. What mighty bounds he must be making! After a mundjak perhaps. Kop, kop, not two minutes ago and the sound is already distant. I can barely hear it. His majesty the Tiger, the Great Unnamed. Indo Chinese language conveys this in two syllables—Bo-Kla or Hong-Kop or Kong Kop. It is seldom spoken as the tiger hears his name no matter how far away he may be. Tiger, King of Earth: Dagon, King of Water; Thunder, King of Heaven—what picturesque personifications the nha-que (native) has for the things he fears. The Moïs believe that the original tiger, the father of his tribe, was once a hero, able, gifted and cruel, who was changed into the animal by a power higher than man. Sometimes a tiger and a man have a dream alliance like the elephants. Perhaps I can penetrate into this mystery.

Again, as I listen intently for a return of the tiger, the little night noises weave a symphony of gentler life. Frogs and other voices in the marsh, a night bird calls, the insects' buzz, form a low monotone of moving things. The languorous air, as I peeped through my hole in the wattle wall, is shot with a pattern of sparks as the fireflies dance in the tropical rhythm. Sinister, too; out there in the blackness a python slithers its purposeful coils, obeying the law of the jungle.

The lure, and charm of an Asian night, portentous, alien beauty, a ruthless call to the senses, a tempo in the blood-stirring deeps of consciousness never plumbed in the temperate levels of an American home! To know all is to understand all, says the mystic. Something of the

## CHAPTER VIII

### A NIGHT AT DAK LAK— AN ABANDONED POSTE

WE come to a halt in front of a high stockade. The gates are firmly closed. From my elephant-back I can just look over them to see a wide enclosure, a cluster of three huts to the right and upon a small hill two hundred yards away a log house, not built as usual. It is placed but two feet from the ground, has windows, and its rear wall supports a veranda overlooking the lake.

“Madame, the elephants must be paid. These men will not remain with us longer and we shall not need them. You can stay here as long as you wish and will be more comfortable in that nice house. I hope it is all right. It has not been used in years. These Mnongs made it too lively for the French and they abandoned the outpost. But I believe there is a caretaker.”

Whereupon my interpreter hallos vigorously and soon a Moï soldier, his gee-string supplemented by a shirt and carrying a rifle, swings open the gates. The luggage is deposited in the log house on the hill. There is the usual palaver while dismissing the elephants. The Moïs employ their fingers to add up accounts. The tips are counted up to five. Then the phalanges are used up to twenty. Then they begin on the other hand. If there is a larger amount to be reckoned with it is done in piles or

## POISON ARROWS

counts of ten. But this is a very big affair indeed. Sometimes they notch a bamboo, Mhos says, but I did not see this. No Moï, apparently, can tell his age. Neither can I discover any counting of time other than the day and night; the light time and the sleep time; wet and dry season; planting, harvesting and resting time. I find no words for year, month or week; nor does there seem to be a reckoning by the moon. Yet these people have some sense of time, some kind of nature's clock. They appear punctually at an agreed time and the same things occur in their lives at the same time of year.

The elephant convoy now disappears out of the compound, out of sight and for ever. Mhos disappears. The soldier closes the gates and disappears. Sturdza and I stand in the middle of our luggage in the middle of a strange house, in the middle of an insoumis country, in the middle of Indo China and look at each other for the first time with embarrassment. Alone, very much alone —together.

"What is the matter, Sturdza? Where is Mhos? Can we get some food? Is there no one about? What was that soldier saying before he left?"

"Madame, it is unfortunate. It seems the soldier has orders to permit no one to use this house. That there is a Moï tram a mile away we can have. It is clean and empty and has a stockade. But I gave him some money and said Madame is very tired and we will stay here to-night. So as not to know about it he has gone away till to-morrow. But Madame need not worry. I myself will prepare some food for her. In the hut yonder is a brazier and some charcoal. Madame shall see what a good cook I am!"

## A NIGHT AT DAK LAK

"But where is Mhos?"

"I—I do not know. I think perhaps he has gone home. His village is not many miles from here. He may come back in the morning. He has some money coming to him."

So, even that frail chaperone is missing!

Sturdza, deep circles under his eyes, doubtless quite as tired as I, selects some tinned things, a handful of rice, a pinch of tea and departs across the enclosure. I survey the interior. One end has a partition seven feet high, two draggled strips of calico serving as a door. The room thus made contains a fourpost bed with a drabbish mosquito netting and a mangy mattress laid on boards. Further luxury is a wooden bench and a rough table upon which is a crockery toilet set, white with pink roses on it. The bowl is cracked and the pitcher has lost its spout. Two unglazed windows complete the elegancies of this apartment.

I drag my bedroll into it. The strappings defy me. Where, oh where is Mhos. Of all nights to depart!

The main room has a table, a stove, two doors, two windows and upon the south wall over two camp cots are hung, convenient for use two rifles, a shotgun and an ammunition belt full of cartridges.

I set the table with our simple camp service. Sturdza staggers in with a collection of food horrors. The rice is glue. The canned corn burnt. Everything, even the water is smoky. But it is nourishment. He has done his best. These villainous charcoal stoves require a technique of their own.

Admiration for this wreck of a man stirs within me. Whence comes his resilience of power? Is it a strain

## POISON ARROWS

from his Scottish mother and her hardy forbears or from his long line of Hungarian ancestors, born to authority; a gentleman bred from them all; plus a wide vision of human relationships from his early cultural training for court circles? There are fibres of character knitting this pale, trembling, exhausted man that keep him from entire disintegration into a grovelling, whining collapse.

I too am utterly weary. It was a particularly trying day and improper food is causing the dreaded tropical upset of my interior economy. It is a triumph of minds over bodies. These physical instruments recording so much static have to be ignored, or, in this environment the light might flicker out for either, or both of us. The will to live governs.

We chat with strained gaiety. I pick up a tin plate upon which is reposing a yellowish mess, sodden and smoky, which had started out to be an omelet (with condensed milk and butter extract).

"Have a little more of the delicious canard *Tour d'Argent*?" We both knew and loved Frederic's famous pressed roast duck.

"Madame does me too much honour. Her humble *ambassadeur des Mois* prepared this trifle for her alone."

"I insist—George." My first use of his Christian name.

The effect is startling. A deep colour suffuses his pallor. His eyelids drop over updrawn eyes. Then the introvert disappears. His eyes open. Chin up, chest out, a cold hand is laid over mine, a low voice:

"Madame, I am here to do what you want. We are alone, utterly alone to-night. It is a wild place. A big tiger is about. It got into the compound two nights ago.

## A NIGHT AT DAK LAK

Our house is on the ground—no protection. Antok, the soldier, who it seems is not the real guardian of the poste, only staying here for a few days while his friend is away—Antok says there is a band of hunting warriors from an unfriendly tribe in this vicinity.

"I shall not sleep to-night. Madame need not worry. I will protect her. Madame needs rest—but if she cannot sleep—I am here—whatever she wishes."

Something new is hovering over this abandoned tram. As bones ache before a storm, subtle electric currents play between us. Is it the lusty ghost of the French engineer, imbued with Colonial moral turpitude, haunting this house he caused to be built in a savage country? Is it the propinquity of a man and woman responding to the untrammelled, unconventional setting of an Asian mid-tropical night, senses keyed to danger from without, tuned to a new awareness of each other from within?

A Brangane warning calls through my brain. Stupid to add the savage fabric of sex to this collection of unsolved problems. I must remember the purpose of this expedition is to study the insoumis Moïs. No more 'George' for me. Rebelliously I repress the imps; reluctantly return to the cool, impersonal tone.

"Thank you, Sturdza. And thank you for turning cook to-night. We must get another servant. Mhos is not enough, even if he comes back, now that we are to settle for a while and get on with the job of studying these people."

A tiny shrug and questioning look, which I let pass unnoticed. A tiny bow:

"Madame's wishes shall be obeyed. I think that soldier boy, Antok, may do when his friend the guardian

## POISON ARROWS

comes back. He speaks a little French, which he learned while serving military duty at Ben Methoût, and is a Mnong, the tribe located around here. He will be useful with the interpreting."

I arise from the untidy table. Scrape the food into one dish. To leave the scraps means hordes of ants in a short time. By common consent no one must venture into that menacing night. Both doors were bolted at dusk and the heavy wooden shutters fastened over the four windows. Fortunately Mhos had left a pail of water. Pouring some of it into my wash-bowl I place the smaller vessel of food within it.

Sturdza follows me into the bedroom and attacks my bed-roll. With evident physical effort he struggles with the buckles, then cuts the leather straps with insouciance, regardless of the days and miles that separate us from the possibility of getting any more. He straightens it out and places it upon the soiled bed. He gives my little pillow a pat.

"*Dors bien, chère Madame.* If later you change your mind—"

He stiffens to attention, listening.

Kop, kop sounds through the night quite close. Is that hunting tiger outside or inside the stockade?

Sturdza goes quietly to the wall in the living-room, takes down the larger rifle, examines it with an exclamation of disgust.

Kop, kop comes to us, very faint. The lithe tawny body is bounding further away in the jungle after his quarry.

"Good! He is going," says Sturdza. "I must clean this."

## A NIGHT AT DAK LAK

From very shame for this spent man I whip up enough energy to help him. Both rifles cleaned and loaded, I say good night and go behind my flimsy curtain. I make a limited night toilet, allow myself the luxury of removing my travelling togs. A cold sponge, orange silk pyjamas and long Chinese coat to match are soothing. I am as quiet as possible. Every sound carries over the partition and the sex atmosphere has not been discharged. It hovers through the isolated house like a genie not properly exorcised back into its lamp.

“*Bonne nuit, Madame. Rêves bien,*” comes a soft voice from the other room. Did he mean for the second time to use the intimate verb ending!

“*Bon soir, Sturdza,*” in a firmer voice than I feel.

I drop into an exhausted, sudden sleep and almost as suddenly awake. Wild, intolerable misery all over me. A dozen itching bites, hell aflame seems to have broken loose on my body. Scarcely awake, I call:

“Sturdza, come here.” Instantly he appears, clad in pyjamas—lavender with purple stripes—carrying the lighted lantern.

“Madame wants me—at last!” He lifts the mosquito net. A silence, while I twist and squirm and scratch.

“Aah-h—I see. It is the red ants. They are terrible. I will get the Keating’s Powder.”

Romance for me at least is entirely destroyed by a handful of creatures not a sixteenth of an inch long. Together we attack the enemy, banish the mangy mattress, listerine the bites. Comparative order is restored.

“Make yourself comfortable, Madame. I will wait and tuck in your mosquito net.”

## POISON ARROWS

I let him do this. Instead of turning away, he hesitates: "Madame is quite comfortable? She would like perhaps to have me lie down beside her for a little—until she sleeps?"

"No, Sturdza, the inflammation is subsiding. I shall sleep. Thank you. And you must not stay awake either. If anything happens outside we shall know it soon enough."

"Very well. But I shall not sleep. I must keep guard until dawn. I will protect you."

The last I know he is lying on his cot, rifle beside him, reading an old French magazine he found on the shelf. I relax wondering whether the ease with which he is controlled is due to real physical incompetence from opium—sex desire more in the head than elsewhere, or to a real sense of protection and *noblesse oblige*—to use one of his own pet phrases—or to my lack of appeal.

Whimsically I remember what the Comtesse asks the Baronne in a story by de Maupassant. When the Comtesse (idol of Paris) relates to her friend that a notorious young criminal served her as personal maid for two weeks before his disguise was discovered, she says:

"And to think I never knew he was a man! Not once did he betray himself—not even when helping me with the bath. Strange! Is it, perhaps, that I am growing old?"

I am a few years Sturdza's senior, yet that is hardly apparent and would it make any difference if he knew? His Oedipus complex is too well-established—all those ramblings about his mother. I suspect a bit of all three emotions motivates him. Human beings are so complicated. No matter. The real hurdle is my own. A vagrant

## A NIGHT AT DAK LAK

impulse to know more about this extraordinary combination of man and dreamer, of strength and weakness—to delve deeper into the secrets of his strange psychology—possibilities, unknown as the portentous jungle outside where wild beasts hunt and armed savages steal along the trail, exotic as the hot orchid-scented nights. I would not be here at all if I were not an explorer . . . I must be careful of these Asiatic nights. They confuse one's objectives.

About half-past four I wake from a restless sleep. A gentle rhythmic sound floats to me. Noiselessly I peep through the calico door. Sturdza is sprawled on his cot, one hand still clutching the magazine, lantern guttering.

A wind has risen, ruffling waves on the lake not a hundred feet from the east wall, beating on the low cliff below.

I sneak back towards the bed—— What is that sound on the veranda! I listen, every sense alert.

Is it a human footprint—or a big animal!

How stupid to leave both rifles in the other room!

There it is again!

No, I will not disturb him. Let that exhausted man sleep his sleep. If the marauder is savage, a tiger or a man, I can deal with it. There is the rifle and there—is—Buddha. Perhaps it is only the wind blowing a loose board.

Probably. Don't be a fool—— What a place! Thus fortified by philosophy I slip under the mosquito netting and wait. No sound now but the wavelets lap-lapping and the gentle snoring of my 'protector'.

Sleep gently wraps about me.

## CHAPTER IX

### HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM—TABUS—THE MATRIARCHS

**A**T six o'clock comes the light and a very welcome Mhos with tea and biscuits.

He explains that when he arrived near his village he saw the dieng sign—a squash and a bunch of leaves tied on the top of a tall pole. Then he saw the bunch of palm strips in front of it and knew the whole village was tabu. Woe to the hardy one coming from outside if he breaks through the dieng and enters the village. No one would speak to him if he did: such an outrage is sufficient cause for war. But this rarely happens. The tabu is held in much respect, even fear. When it is pronounced upon a whole village by the chief, a pholy or a group of dignitaries, it is usually because of disaster, illness or a threatened epidemic and acts as a kind of quarantine. Mhos says it generally lasts three days, during which time no one can have communication from without, neither give it nor receive it. The husbands keep away from their wives; the young men from the young girls.

The happy chance of our servant's return was due to the hard choice Mhos had to make of coming back to us, or of retiring to a distance and waiting for the ban to lift. While I have often inwardly fumed at a tabu, this one is highly acceptable.

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

Sturdza says he has heard that in some tribes a tabu is practised to isolate the house where an expectant mother awaits delivery.

Among the personal tabus, besides that of the poison and the python elsewhere noted, certain animals and birds are believed to be of ill omen. Also certain actions, such as forgetting something when leaving home; to go back for it brings bad luck.

Antithetically, certain happenings bring good fortune and a form of the ancient belief in fetich stones survives. In several households I saw a small stone carefully wrapped and highly prized which has been handed down from generation to generation always in charge of the 'elder sister'. Another manner in which stones are used as marks of respect I noticed yesterday on the trail. It was a pile of small stones near a village. It is the custom to drop a pebble on it when passing. Sometimes the spot marks a burial, but not always. Beyond this Mhos is not clear.

Life drops back into the usual routine with Sturdza. Tracks of a big tiger are found this morning near the east veranda. He must have been a very big fellow to jump our nine foot stockade! That sound I heard last night was not my imagination. Hoping to get him I arrange with Antok to have a mirador or platform of bamboo, built fifteen feet up in a tree in the area where the tiger has been hunting. It is reached by a sketchy ladder of two bamboo poles with cross pieces so far apart that it will be an acrobatic feat to climb them. After the manner of the country I buy an old horse for bait to be staked near the mirador. A cruel practice but here it is a life for a life and the little Moï horse is not long for this world. I

## POISON ARROWS

order good fodder for him. At least he will enjoy life while waiting for his fate whether it be the sad flickering out of age or the sharp onslaught of mighty paws and jaws. When it becomes the Royal One's prey, it will be left to ripen into succulence for tiger palate. Then I shall do penance on the platform, companioned by mosquitoes and fatigue and an ardent hope that the Mighty One will come to his banquet and submit to being killed. After obligingly losing his body he will seek another one in accordance with Moï tiger custom.

In the course of the morning the luggage is transferred man-back and horseback, to the empty tram a mile further down the lake. Sturdza and I follow, rifles in hand, and take possession. Antok is waiting at the stockade gate to let us in. He closes it remarking, as he looks at the eight foot barrier of five inch logs bound closely together:

"Not high enough. A tiger leaped over it last year with a young deer in its jaws."

However, lightning and tigers rarely strike twice in the same place and I am glad to be housekeeping on a ten foot level behind it. After last night it is pleasant to climb a ladder to my home. The kitchen is a separate hut on the ground below equipped with a charcoal and wood stove, in the control of which at luncheon Antok proves a little more skilful than Mhos.

That afternoon we all set out for the Mnong village of Ben Te ar two or three miles away. I elect to ride, preferable in the blazing heat.

Not so minded the Moï horse engaged to accommodate me. Although small, not more than pony size, the Moï equine is a sturdy beast and even less disciplined than the

HOUSEKEEPING IN  
MY BOYS MHOS (left) AND ANTOK

WANTED TO WITNESS MEMBERSHIP IN THE AR.

(1850) A 15th Chieftess of the <sup>been</sup>



## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

Moï elephant. This specimen begins at once to qualify for the prize in a rodeo. He bucks, plunges, snorts, kicks from all four corners in unmistakable protest against carrying this strange, queer-smelling creature. Two feet is as near as I can get to that Moï horse even with its nose turned away. As the animal is unencumbered by saddle or bit—a bamboo charm on its neck the sole equipment—after spending some time trying to placate it, I perforce reverse decision and elect to walk.

A few miles of broiling, blistering sun and we arrive, somewhat wilted, at a collection of thirty or forty houses near a stream—the Mnong village of Ben Te ar. Two stalwart warriors are shaping logs to repair a house. Their well-shaped, muscled, bronze bodies are girdled with a broad leather belt studded with copper. A graceful sinewy lad of about seventeen clad in a gee-string and a large mushroom straw hat is skilfully weaving rushes together for the thatching of its roof. He sits on his heels surrounded by bundles of rushes. His frank boyish grin is a quick response to my smile.

Nearby on a veranda a middle-aged woman is weaving a strip of brown cloth. Soon a group of seven women assemble on the back veranda of the chief's house to have a look at us. Our unusual appearance produces only mild interest, no more than a strange bird might have done. We are accepted with simplicity—no giggling—no derision—but no welcome. Uncertain of our reception we proceed leisurely. Mhos explains that we are making a friendly visit. I am permitted to join this group of women, to climb the ladder and make some presents of tomato cans—bits of tin being appreciated nearly as much as the mirrors. I gradually come to know

## POISON ARROWS

that the group consists of an old chiefess, her two youngest sisters, three daughters and a son's wife.

The chiefess of Ben Te ar is more expressive than the other women. Pulling on a long-stemmed bamboo pipe, she observes me with large serious eyes; curiously, almost gaily, but asks no questions. Twice she refills the little bowl of her pipe with the long staple Moï tobacco which is of the rankest variety. I was thankful she did not invite me to join her. I suspect that a few whiffs are sufficient to burn the Adam's apple and send experimenting Tom Sawyers and Huck Finns on a knife hunting quest.

One of the younger sisters is weaving—a back-breaking job. She is seated at a loom similar to that of the chiefess of Bonne Deun. She shows me a droy almost completed. It is a long scarf, about six yards long and twelve inches wide, of dark blue cotton firmly woven and no doubt will have fringe at the ends worked with little cylinders of copper and of beads. This scarf, when worn by her husband, will be passed around the waist, between the thighs and buttocks without covering them, and tied at the side; one end will be brought back as a small apron in front, about fifteen inches long, and the other end looped to hang over the right thigh in sartorial elegance.

The other sister disappears into the house and returns with a langouti which she has just finished for herself. This women's garment is a straight piece of cloth worn from waist to knees and is free on the left side.

Mhos says many tribes have special patterns of weaving, such as small lozenges in red or white, or red lines which are distinctive to the particular village from whence they come.

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

Hanging on the house wall of this veranda room are several baskets; one is three feet deep, supplied with a wooden base and with thongs for carrying loads on the back. Several are winnowing baskets, called van. They hold fluffy balls of cotton waiting for the women to spin them and wind on their primitive spinning wheels of bamboo and rattan.

Beside a section of hollow tree trunk the youngest daughter stands, her hands grasping a long wooden pole which she holds upright and rhythmically brings down upon a mass of paddy in the wooden mortar. Like weaving, this slow hard work of decorticating the home rice is part of the woman's job, unless it can be relegated to the children.

A little girl runs out on the veranda and stands eyeing me with wonder. She is naked but must be about five years old and therefore soon will be draped in a straight strip of cloth around her tiny waist while her brothers may still run around naked until about ten years of age.

The old chiefess caresses her grandchild by rubbing the nose with her own. I understand from Mhos that kissing is not unknown among the adults but usually reserved for the married embrace.

The older woman of Ben Te ar seems to have an advantage over the younger. After forty she appears more coquettish, better looking, and even when she is not a chiefess has more the air of authority than the men of her family. The tabu-making power of dieng is usually accorded to a woman. Mhos pointed out one old sorceress squatting on a back veranda whose powers are in great repute. The pholy or priest officiates at certain

## POISON ARROWS

ceremonies, but it is the tribal head, the chiefess of Ben Te ar who must perform certain high traffic with the spirits.

The Mnong women seem more refined than their mates, but not so well-proportioned; they are often ugly with the trunk large and the legs short, top of the thighs fleshy, the arms slender but a little long for beauty. The face is usually tired, dull, without much expression, set in tired lines: the mouth is often badly shaped, lips full but not gross; the redeeming feature is the large dark eyes, veiled by lashes, very long and black, in whose sombre depths seem to lie the secrets of their race.

Sturdza, through Mhos, tells this Moï legend of why the women are ugly. Once in the old days, the Moïs say they lived inside the earth and a smarter Moï than the others found the way out, saying the world was so beautiful they should go and enjoy it. The young men and the old men and the old women got ready quickly but the young women stopped to make themselves beautiful and lost time so that the hole, which was narrow, was further blocked by a stone and the young women had to squeeze through, and that is why their faces are flat and their noses are flat.

Sturdza and I, using Antok and Mhos for interpreters, gradually evolve much information and my notebook rapidly fills with a jumble of English, French and Annamese, even Moï, phrases. We return to the tram ready for a tinned food supper and sleep.

Day after day we spend our time among the Mnong villages. Little by little I am beginning to understand some of the conditions that prevail in this matriarchal society and to speculate on how much it follows the

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

general pattern of matriarchy in the past and even now scattered over the world. I know that in the matriarchal system the primogeniture follows the eldest daughter instead of the eldest son, and that it is as old as primitive civilization. It flourished among the early Greeks and Romans and I have found it among such widely separated peoples as the Nairs on the West coast of India, the Batiks of Sumatra. I have seen traces of it among the tribes of North America and in the Mountain Province of Luzon.

Quite clearly I am on the wrong track if I expect to find a complete reversal of habits and customs and observe women as 'the boss' among the matriarchal Moïs as we find paterfamilias lording it over the family, in our own civilization.

There is no power for anyone in a communal society, such as we have under our man-controlled capitalistic order.

There is nothing among the Moïs equivalent to the domination which our advanced societies exercise through individuals, through classes or through rulers. This lower culture is strictly equalitarian. The economic dependent woman which is the real base upon which a patriarchal constitution rests does not exist here nor does any notion of privileged right show itself. Here is a division of labour and both sexes are interdependent. It seems to be an economic and not a sexual association. The Moïs provide for the economic needs of the family or clan, both brothers and sisters, quite apart from any association of sexual partners. The sex associates of the woman are something plus added to the community but not indispensable to its existence. The Moï woman is not

## POISON ARROWS

removed from her group as with us to form a separate household with her husband.

The Moï culture is almost entirely confined to the household sphere. The man contributes the raw materials, not the wages of production. There is no building up a superstructure of intangible wealth as with us. There does not seem to be any of the domination of one sex over the other which characterizes a patriarchal society. I suspect that our own society would soon lose its patriarchal character, founded on masculine economic dominance, were our machinery of wealth production to revert to the dimensions of household industry where if there is any advantage of one sex over the other that advantage may be scored to the side of the woman.

Having cleared my mind of the improbable bogey that mother-right means female dominance in the sense that father-right has meant male dominance, I go back to the simple living of these children of the high plateau and the flooding rivers and tangled forests.

My contacts have been chiefly with the Rahdes, the Djarays, the Mnongs and the Bihs. I also visited briefly the Cho Ma tribe in the Province of Bienhoa, around Chua Chan not forty kilometres from Saigon. They have straight, well-knit, well-muscled bodies, the men wear gee-strings; the women a short skirt woven in small stripes and wrapped on the left side. Frequently this langouti is ornamented with fringed balls. All wear beads around the neck and have the earlobes stretched an inch or more to hold a cylinder of wood, brass or ivory. The women are burden bearers. The lower limbs are heavy, especially the calves and ankles, and the feet are broad. Certain European sophistication has crept in. I

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

remember a kerosene lantern, a flash light, an enamel pot and the demand for money if asked to pose for a photograph.

The other tribes I come to know, on the contrary, are untouched by outside influence, with one or two small exceptions among these Rahdes living at Ben Methoût.

The Mnongs are one of a score of Moïs tribes which spread over many hundreds of square miles and on the borders scatter through the Annamese villages in the south and east, the Laotian in the north and the Cambodian in the west. Over this territory the French claim sovereignty but this particular part of it still remains 'unsworn'. The chiefs of these villages where Sturdza and I have been working not yet have sworn allegiance by 'touching the bracelet'.

Among the Mnongs, life seems to follow the general matriarchal pattern. The chief became so when he married the chiefess and her house, which had been her mother's house, became the chief's house. He acts as a kind of royal steward, the tribal administrator. In many cases the bridegroom has the status of visitor in the bride's home. His mother's house remains his home. Sometimes he takes up quarters in the bachelors' dormitory, where the old men live. But the chief always lives in his wife's house. This may be sixty to ninety feet long and is about twenty feet wide. The floors are made of split rattan made on cross poles with occasional lashings, so resilient that I never entirely got over the feeling that one might crash through to the ground at some weak spot. As already noted the family dispose of banana skins or any detritus by pushing it through the cracks for the usual pigs rooting below. A few small openings

## POISON ARROWS

in the walls with woven rattan slides provide light on occasion. The roof is attached with native grasses woven in layers. An open platform at each end supplies storage and a place for family outdoor life.

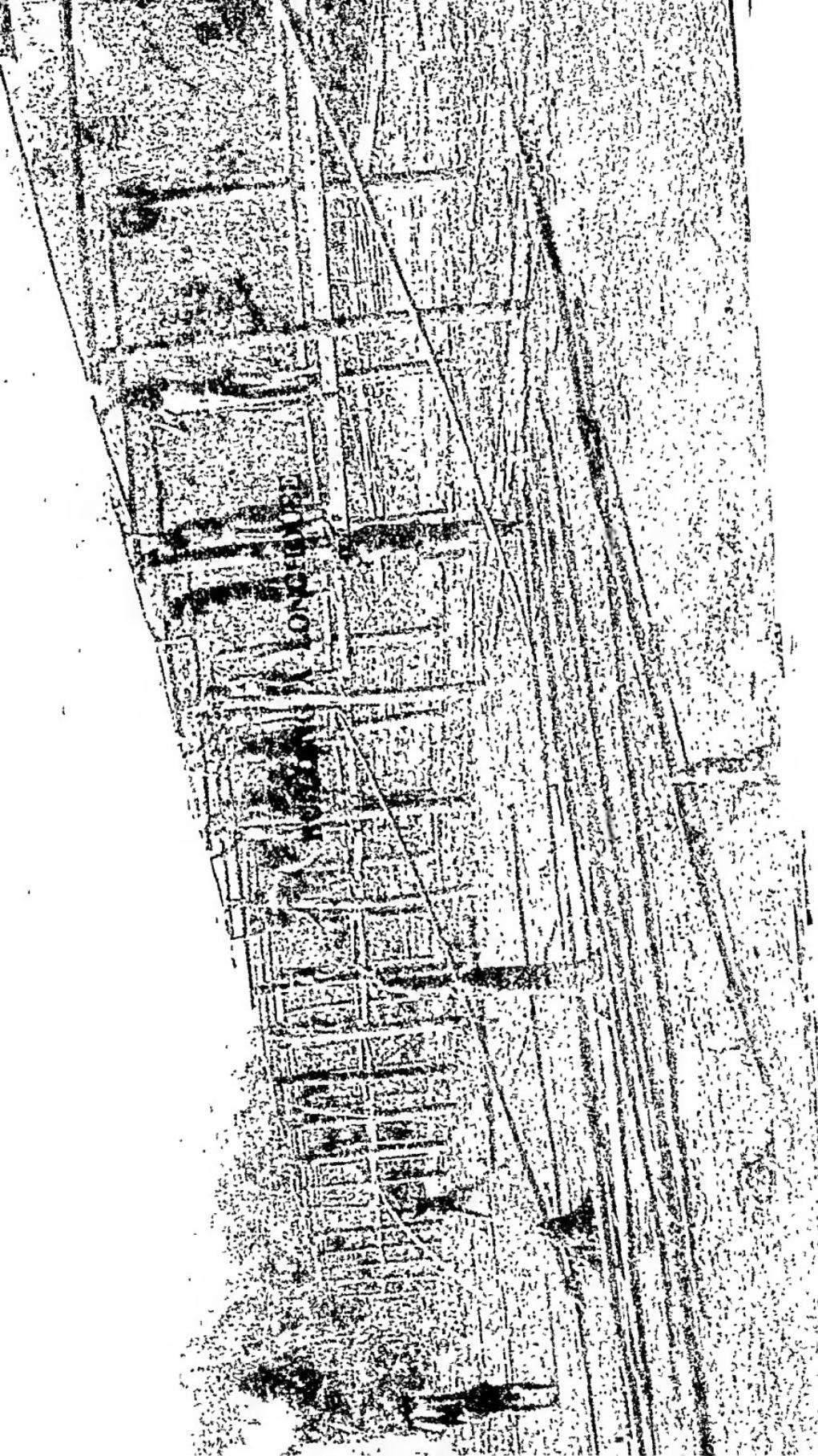
Mnongs, unlike the Bihs, do not follow the widespread practice of piercing and enlarging the ear lobes.

I notice no tattooing, no mutilation except the practice of breaking off the six upper and lower teeth. This is done sometimes by means of a knife held at the back of the tooth and a quick crack on it by another very sharp knife. Boys and girls as young as six years are submitted to this ordeal. In other tribes the child is much older and the act is done with stones.

Puberty among the girls appears to arrive late, towards the age of fifteen. The breasts are placed high, well attached to the shoulders, round and firm in youth, when the dark aureole is especially large and puffed. In all the Moï tribes and even, I am told, among the Cambodians and Annamites, the belief is prevalent that sexual relations develop the breast of a young girl, quite as well as maternity but it seems recognized—often with a smile—that age is sufficient to do that, as the unmarried young women and the virgins all look 'as though they were married'.

The women age quickly to about forty owing to their frequent child-bearing, weaving and household drudgery. Their labour is more constant and less developing than that of the men. They are often not well but keep going so long as they are able to stand.

I discuss diseases with Sturdza who now rouses from his nap and, though plainly suffering from need of his poppy prop, valiantly carries on.





## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

"Don't forget to put in that bit about the pregnant women from Henri Baudesson. He was a long resident among certain tribes and ought to know."

Sturdza goes into the hut, rummages among his things and returns with a bit of paper on which in his sprawling handwriting is the quotation. I suspect a bit of dross has assuaged his pangs. He seems calmer.

"A pregnant woman has a special hut and strangers are forbidden to enter the village . . . the tabu is known as 'dieng' and in other regions a 'Calam', (in Pnong it is *viele*). The prospective mother's house is distinguished by a tuft of pompel-moose and a piece of charcoal suspended from the roof. The woman in labour assumes a sitting position, her stomach is rubbed with tiger's gut and she must lean against the knees of a female nurse . . . other tribes, the Tho for example, the woman is made to stand, supported by two cords under her armpits. The newborn is washed and anointed with cocoanut oil . . . navel string cut with sharpened bamboo, the placenta burned in or near the house . . . Con-Nie is the baby's name for two years and he suckles all the time, a great strain on the mother."

Besides this special burden of childbearing I have noticed that the women are subject to certain diseases which also take their toll of the men. No one has immunity from exposure to the rigours of the climate—jungle fever, congestion and coughs.

There are two diseases that seem especially to plague the Mnongs.

## POISON ARROWS

"Sturdza," I call to that gentleman who is below near the kitchen, struggling with Antok over the supper menu. "Do you know the name of that swelling on the thigh sometimes in front, sometimes in the back that both men and women often have?"

"It is called pon and Antok seems to think it is due to the hardness of their beds, which are usually on the ground or a bumpy rattan floor."

The other affliction about which nothing seems to be done is ringworm, called kos. The young people are especially plagued as it destroys the good looks of their bodies. Those in contact with the French ask for a remedy, parang, meaning French, European, or foreign.

Sturdza calls to me again: "That old pholy at Yen La says that leprosy, so common among the Chinese and to a lesser extent among the Annamites, is rare among the Cambodians and even more rare among the Moïs so far as anyone knows. But they have a name for it, kreen-khlong—which is compounded of the Pnong word for rheumatism and the Cambodian word for leper."

After another strenuous day at Ben Drah village I am resting and going over food notes. Sturdza has disappeared.

Besides the industries of spinning, weaving, dyeing, pot making, fishing, and doing their share of the rice culture and other communal activities, the women preside over the culinary department.

The Moïs, like most people who wrest a living from untamed nature, seem to eat almost anything that does not bite them first. They eat generally in the morning upon rising, at noon and at sunset. But their meals are

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

not very regular nor do they follow any menu, taking anything that comes handy except for those repasts that the women prepare of hot cooked food.

Usually the meat is cut into little pieces, as there are no incisors to tear it, and is stuffed into the mouth with the hands. No chopsticks are used. Rice and staple food, fish, maize, are gobbled in a like manner, gustatory habits being a matter of inheritance and environment.

Some of the articles I saw on the Moï diet included the flesh of dogs, cats, rats and snakes, frogs and toads. Mhos says that white worms, both red and black ants and the placenta of cattle and water buffalo are also eaten. Peacocks, pheasants and other birds are tidbits. Also acceptable are fish of all kinds, any vegetables, the roots of many kinds of plants and trailing vines and the tender leaves of almost any kind of tree that is not poisonous. Also, of course, the sticky rice which is cooked in the earthen pots with very little water. If a pot is not available a section of bamboo is used. Especially is this done on the trail. The rice is washed and put in a section of freshly cut bamboo, the end closed and thrust into the fire. When the bamboo is burned the rice is cooked.

Antok tells me that if salt is not obtainable the Moïs sometimes cook the food in water that has been steeped in ashes.

Yesterday from Thoût, the old pholy at Yen La, I learned of an individual family tabu which forbids eating some particular food in a particular family. It may be the flesh of deer or rabbit or of a turtle or the leg of a cricket. If eaten dire illness, possibly death will follow. Old Thoût believes it firmly.

This afternoon I finish writing the above and close my

## POISON ARROWS

notebook. I am alone. A little carking worry is assailing me. Where is Sturdza? He has been gone from the compound a long time.

The 'python' is pulling me down. Morale at a low ebb, I feel a physical inadequacy to cope with this country of continual surprises, always on the edge of possible unpleasant happenings from man and beast and climate. The frail prop of Sturdza, also a potential springer of unpleasant surprises, is my one link to the known and the comfortable. The miasma of a sick body, of course. But there it is. A prolonged bout of intestinal disorder is weakening resistance—two wrecks carrying on, getting the stuff I came for.

We are working with unintelligent interpretation from Mhos and Antok. Often as the scent grows hot for some new fact we bang up against a tabu and have to start again from an oblique angle and sneak up on the desired information before one's intention is suspected. In all this Sturdza is an invaluable aid. He is intelligent, widely cultivated, patiently sympathetic with the tedium of this little ethnological study.

It is growing dark. Still no Sturdza. Mhos is also absent. Anything can happen in this country.

I descend the ladder and interview Antok, whom I find in the kitchen, preparing the usual gluey rice and smoky tea for supper. I make out enough of his queer French to gather that Sturdza took Mhos and a rifle and has gone to see what has happened at the mirador. Another hour has travelled into the past—very slowly.

A black shape weaves overhead—a bat of ill omen. Menacing hollow notes croak from the marsh. Gloom trails its shadow through the tram, settles suddenly

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

within my house of life. Another stretch of present drags itself into the past. No Sturdza.

It is quite dark when a noise at the gate brings the two hunters carrying a peacock proudly between them on a stick. My relief accentuates my enthusiasm over the beauty of this bird. A thousand metallic blue eyes gleam among its glistening bronze plumes. A more beautiful specimen could not be imagined, very large, with a tail that covers six feet of the stockade wall when spread out fan wise. Sturdza is very proud. It is the most manly thing he has done in years.

"I killed it with one shot! Used to have a good eye—when I was in the army. Haven't lost it. Madame can trust me. I am coming back every day! There was nothing at the mirador, no tracks, the old horse is happy, has plenty of fodder and water. As we were coming through the woods, we heard a peacock scream but far away. Luckily it came our way. I caught a glimpse of it and took a quick pot at it. Isn't it a beauty! Does Madame want some pheasants? I can easily get them. The golden, silver and Chinese—all the gorgeous varieties are about here. I am a good shot!"

"Sturdza, that will be splendid. They are good eating, too. But next time let me go with you when you visit the mirador. I want to be the one to bag that tiger, you know."

I do not tell him it is not so much concern about shooting the tiger as keeping track of my erratic interpreter. I forgive him a touch of peevishness:

"That is Madame's privilege. I would not presume. I only want to make a report. If there was anything happening I would have come back for you, of course."

## POISON ARROWS

After supper, we chat pleasantly as usual about the day's work.

"Did you understand, Sturdza, that *mnam* is the Moï word for drink, or meat or both?"

"I think often it means anything that is put into the mouth that is food or drink." Sturdza continues:

"They seem to have a good many Annamese words mixed up. I quite often understand what they are saying, although I do not know the ancient Khmer from which their language is supposed to be derived. You remember the very name Moï is Annamese. It means savage. In the north the Laotian call the adjacent tribes Khas such as the Bolovan, Alak, Halang, Banhar, and Djaray and to the west on the Cambodian border the Moï families are called Pnongs. That is a perverted form of Mnong or maybe it is the other way around."

Sturdza stops a moment, then adds:

"Nobody knows how many there are in this Moï nation. The tribes are scattered over a vast area. There are the Thais in the south living near Annamese villages. And the Stiengs—who sometimes eat their enemies—"

His voice trails into silence. Ever since dross has been substituted for the pipe there has been an absence of those long excited torrents of speech that flowed compellingly at Nhatrang and Ben Methoût. It used to feel like a weird movie reel of a brain made mad by over excitement. As the dross is not pleasant, a terrible poison, I notice that the amount taken has been reduced to the minimum that will keep him comfortable. Since that night at Dak Lak our relations have been kept friendly, but firmly polite.

"Good night, Sturdza."

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

"Good night, Madame."

He seeks his corner. I seek mine.

All is quiet in the tram.

Then a catalysis enters the working chemistry of our studies into a primitive civilization. One evening at sundown we return to find another servant in the kitchen and Ballestrier ensconced in my camp chair on the veranda. He greets us like long-lost friends. As he reseats himself in the chair, and there is no other place, I go inside to lie on my bedding—spread as usual on the floor, under a netting. In the opposite end of this thirty-foot room is a strange bed-roll; Sturdza's blanket has been pushed aside.

Willy nilly there are three of us in the tram. At supper the camp table is crowded. A box is found for an extra seat. Ballestrier has brought very few provisions, eats liberally of our diminishing stock, talks a stream of French, which prevents our usual checking up on the findings of the day.

He has travelled a devious way from Ben Methoût in a pirogue, following water courses, and that day foolishly wore shorts. His legs are red and swollen from a bad case of sun-burn.

He gives airily his reason for being here—he wishes to get a *coup d'œil* of the country, to locate some big game, perhaps he might guide a company of hunters here next year. He tells of running across a Frenchman several miles up the lake who has 'gone native', probably because he 'left his country for his country's good'. I wonder if our voluble guest is also interested in keeping out of sight.

The night is punctuated by Ballestrier's groans as he

## POISON ARROWS

heaves his bulk from side to side seeking surcease from the swollen, cooked-lobster legs. With more than a second degree burn in some places the man is feverish and flighty, so cruel a toll does the tropic sun take from a European skin. I supply oil and bandages and Sturdza labours over him.

Next day a high fever and special care, and the next day and the next. Now he is mending fast, shows no disposition to move on.

A change is coming over Sturdza. He is irritable and snaps out little speeches. This morning, using a favourite phrase I say:

"Would you mind telling Mhos that—?"

He snaps: "I shall have to do it whether I mind or not."

The virus of Ballestrier's subtle innuendoes concerning his inferior position is working. 'Being bossed by a woman whose skirt you have never lifted' was one of these pleasant asides. A new Sturdza who laughs at dirty jokes and the loose ends of a ceaseless weaving of double meanings that thread the Frenchman's brain, assuming that I shall not understand.

I catch the drift of a little plot between Ballestrier and Antok, who is not above a bribe, to show Monsieur to Madame's mirador and let him watch for the tiger when she is not there, and if he gets it Antok is not to know where the tiger was found; and when the government's bounty of sixty rupees is paid, Antok will get his share.

This unsporting attitude makes suspicion dark in my bosom that soon something will happen to make our departure advisable.

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

Two nights later I hear a low moaning, like an animal in pain. It does not come from Ballestrier's corner. That person is now as lusty as possible. It is in Sturdza's direction. I listen.

The night, languorous, heavy with marsh damp, drifts through the little window at my head. It is vocal with frogs and insects carrying on their business in the reeds that fringe the lake beyond our western palisade. On the edge of the woods at the north come the staccato notes of the hunting tiger—death in leaping bounds pursuing some unfortunate four-foot. One carnivore, perhaps two, is certainly in the vicinity. Perhaps the mirador and its bait will be visited. I smile grimly at Ballestrier's treachery.

The pitiful whimper has subsided. I drift off into sleep.

Dawn—and commotion in the tram. Sturdza is milling around among his things, scattering the sparse contents of his suitcase and duffel bag. The floor around him is strewn with socks, shirts, a necktie, a linen suit, a soiled towel. Ballestrier's voice:

"It is too bad, my friend. Where could you have put it? Surely you have some more—a supply?"

"Yes. I had a big lump, enough to last a long time. But I cannot find it. It should be right here in my suitcase. It's gone, gone——"

"Sturdza—your opium?"

"Yes, Madame. I missed it last evening and said nothing about it. For I had another lump in my duffel bag. That is gone, too. I do not understand. I tried to do without it last night. Ah, Madame, you will never know what hell that is. Then I found a bottle of Pare-

## POISON ARROWS

goric in your medicine kit. I—I hope you will not need it."

The bottle is empty, empty too is the Cholera Remedy—all I had.

Dressing quickly I begin a systematic search through his things, through every piece of luggage we have, while a ghost of a man, knees drawn to chin, arms clasped around them, sits on the floor in the midst of the pitiful litter—watches me as I turn out feverishly a heterogeneous mess, barren of the one thing that meant comfort, sanity, life itself to him.

Visions of what will happen to this opium-soaked body if the drug is suddenly withdrawn—a crazy man, he might make a mad dart for the French Outpost and the R.O. shop. More than likely he might 'end it all', perhaps become a murderer—no prophesying what reactions his tortures might assume.

Failure! I can find nothing; neither dross nor opium.

"Sturdza, did you really have this extra supply? Or did you dream you had it?"

"I had it." The reply came simply, convincingly. "I—I had another little piece, also, which I used to nibble on during the day."

Desperately, again I search every scrap of his personal clothing. I pick up a smelly, old sweater, its red faded to brown, elbows out. In the pocket is an evil-smelling lump, brown and sticky, wrapped in tinfoil. Eureka!

"Sturdza, what is this?" As a drowning man grabs a life line, his trembling hands clutch that blessed lump of dross.

My relief is hardly less than his. I watch him take what he needs. It is really very little, that door out of hell.

## HOUSEKEEPING IN A TRAM

Agony, perhaps tragedy and the breaking up of my expedition is averted. The supply will last several days. Firmly, I take possession of the foolish little package, potent with pleasant dreams or hideous nightmares. Grotesque, bizarre, if it had not been pathetic.

"Now, my friend, I will keep this and give you what you want when you want it."

His face flushes a little at the masterful tone. We have always maintained the pleasant fiction that he is his own man.

"Shall I?" In a softer voice: "Don't you want me to—until we can send a runner for some more? It will take several days, you know."

"As you wish, Madame. I am only your servant."

Maledictions on our Mephistophelian guest. He is ruining Sturdza's morale and self-respect.

Doubtless he knows very well how the opium disappeared. But I have no proof. He shall not get this bit, nor force us to leave till we are ready.

Sturdza goes outside, yellowish green, vomits. Comes back asking for more. Thus it comes about that day and night I keep that acrid little package on my person. Opium, my pet abomination, now becomes a bosom friend. Pinned in my skirt pocket, I guard it closer than the money belt and emit its sickly-sweet odour like an addict.

## CHAPTER X

YEN LA ME—AMONG THE MNONGS—THE MEN

BALLESTRIER is making himself particularly agreeable this afternoon. Insists upon accompanying us to the new village, Yen La Me, and nearly meets his fate with the chief's elephant. It is roaming loose among the houses. Previous experience with the uncertain temper of pachyderms makes me give one a wide berth, especially when not attended by a comac. Our Frenchman, with two glasses of cognac aiding his digestion of lunch, and no longer walking on bologna sausages for legs, declines to deviate from his course. This is towards a pretty maiden wearing anklets, a short skirt and a sweet smile who is standing under the shade of her house winnowing rice.

This takes him close to the big beast lazily swinging his trunk. Antok's 'take care' is met with a shrug. The maiden arrests her shallow basket in mid air and retains a graceful pose for a moment, watching; then kites up her ladder to safety. Sturdza, the boys and I unostentatiously put several houses between us and the possible drama about to be enacted.

The half-tamed lord of beasts rocks on forefeet once or twice, waves his trunk in the air, a battle flag before charging.

Ballestrier has met elephants in Africa. He abandons

## YEN LA ME

his lordly attitude, dashes under a house, doubles back, skips up the ladder and dives through the back door straight into the interior of the women's quarters.

A loud cackle of outraged feminine voices results.

As rock is thrown from a geyser Ballestrier is spewed forth upon the veranda in a spate of women. A small boy, scuttling under the houses to avoid the irate elephant, scurries to the longhouse to apprise the chief. That dignitary, a stalwart, upstanding man of thirty emerges in a definitely black mood, having been rudely awakened from a siesta. He throws us a cold, unsmiling glance as he strides along. Our cautiously built-up friendly relations are tottering. We hasten to join the chief and to placate; bringing Mhos and Antok into action. My milk of human kindness is slightly sour concerning B.

By the time the matter is explained, the little mirrors duly presented, the quadruped calmed and peace restored much valuable daylight passes.

My objective this day is to learn more about the occupations of the men, so far as I can separate them from those of the women.

Much of the business of living is shared by both sexes in the Mnong communal village. This leaves few activities which either sex performs exclusively. Cooking, baby tending and pounding the corn are women's work, but there is no sharp line drawn. The men, except warriors, often help, especially the older men. Likewise the women work in the fields and carry loads, on occasion, with the men. I never saw a woman use the cross-bow or the Moï axe.

Fortunately the village is quite busy about a number of things. For several days the Yen La Me and the

## POISON ARROWS

nearby villages have been 'resting' which seems a highly popular pastime, and occurs after several days of hard work when the whole village has turned out to plant or to labour in some field of tobacco or rice. They have also been feasting. In the centre of the village I notice a pointed stake pierced with one hole and covered with crude drawings of men's heads and heads of serpents. Upon it is hung offerings of meat and bits of any food that is being eaten by the inhabitants of this village so that the spirits may have their share of the festivity.

A scene under trees on the edge of the village attracts me. Two men evidently of the warrior type are standing near an open fire, each riding an infant on his right hip. They are wearing only droys and the usual bead necklace; the long hair is neatly smoothed back and tightly gathered into a knot at the back of the head. They are evidently relaxing in the family circle. Their lances are leaning against a tree. When guarding the village, the point of a warrior's lance is stuck in the ground as a sign of peace.

Also part of this family scene is an older man sitting on his heels in the midst of a tangle of stripped rattan, busily weaving the large flat tray, three feet across, that the women use for winnowing rice and sorting cotton. He gives me a quizzical old-man smile as I photograph him.

Nearby under another tree a young girl and an old man are pounding maize into flour. They both have hold of a long heavy stick which they lift evenly and plunge into the wooden mortar which holds the corn.

A woman is squatting over the fire cooking some young leaves in an earthen pot. This I understand she

## YEN LA ME

has made herself. As Mhos explains it to me, the process is simple. When the women fashion these crude pots they shape them in clay, dry them in the sun and bake them in a fire after they have covered them with a big ball of paddy. This burns slowly and gradually burns away allowing the heat to penetrate to the pot with increasing intensity. After about six hours the bundle is removed and the pot is put beside the fire and frequently turned so as to cool it off evenly.

I am about to go over to look at the pots more closely when my fastidious companion returns from a closer inspection of this group by the fire. He whispers:

"Madame better not go near those women over there. They are mangy."

"Mangy!" I exclaim in a low tone not allowing surprise to show on my face. These people are sensitive and suspicious and sense criticism though not understanding our language.

"Yes, those women are covered with scabs, poor devils—some skin disease—may be catching. By George, look at that little chap," he continues, thus diverting attention from the women to another member of this family group, a small boy about six years old practising with a miniature cross-bow. So complicated and difficult is the use of this weapon that the boys must begin training very early.

One of the warriors obligingly goes for a bow and arrows and poses for a series of photographs demonstrating the aim.

It is a strange sight in this twentieth century to examine this archaic bow, like the cross-bow of Robin Hood and his men. A light shaft of red wood about four feet long,

## POISON ARROWS

an inch wide, and three-eighths of an inch thick is notched on both sides. At one end the bow-string is attached. Near the other end, nine inches from it, at right angles, and nearly as long, is the cross piece.

Much skill and many pounds of pressure is required in drawing the Moī bow. The hunter slips an arrow from his bamboo quiver, holds it in position between the first and second fingers of his right hand, takes quick aim at his target, then pivoting on his left leg and using the right one as additional purchase to help the hands and arms, he swings entirely around as he pulls the cord and bends the bow into position. This is accomplished as the body arrives at the original stance from which the aim has been taken and 'bing' goes the arrow. The muscles of the right thigh seem more developed because of this peculiar aim. Questions as to how this aim became established were met by the usual: "Our father's fathers did it this way."

The arrow is short, twenty-two or twenty-four inches, lightly winged with triangular pieces of palm, and has a small flint head on which is smeared the blackish coating of vegetable poison. Some of the deadly stuff is also put where the flint, sharpened rock, or bit of metal joins the shaft. Arrows for hunting are easy to recognize. They are supple rattan cane, pointed and hardened in the fire. War arrows are often cut less regularly.

The subject of the poison used on the hunter's arrow tips, is tabu. Like the flight of an ill-omened bird or the gliding of a snake across one's path, it is ominous. I have learned to heed a 'Keep Off' when it first appears—a scowl, a stiffening, or a silence. Sturdza and I made many a devious approach to the forbidden topic to obtain any



MNONG WARRIOR

BOW,

## YEN LA ME

information concerning it. The Mnong fears that talk on this subject might direct the attention of the Poison genie to him; perhaps an enemy arrow might find his heart, or he might prick a finger while preparing his arrows. The slightest scratch is perilous. Recently, at one of the tribal outposts, an official was shot at. The arrow was deflected and barely grazed the skin through thick clothing. Precautions and restoratives were taken at once. After a long struggle, the man survived.

Surprisingly enough, the poison does not affect the meat of an animal, which usually drops at the first impact of the arrow. As soon as killed, hunks are hacked off, raw, dripping with blood and flavoured with juices of the intestines, as a kind of Worcestershire Sauce. When I asked why the meat was eaten like this, the Moï hunter replied with a note of surprise at so foolish a question:

"Why, it is hot and juicy and the other stuff gives good taste."

The poison, we learn eventually, is made from the resin of a tree called Kach in some localities, Kam among the Ktul tribe south of A-tep, Kuy in Cambodia, and Keck among the Bihs. The tree is quite rare, one serving as many as twenty villages at times. The sap is collected in a gourd or section of bamboo. What I saw was a syrupy liquid, brown in colour like opium or caramel. It causes death almost instantaneously if taken into the blood—even a tiny puncture may be fatal. The victim staggers, stiffens and is soon dead. Taken into the stomach, diluted with water, it has produced no effect. Like the poison-toad venom I examined at San Paolo, South America, in the Institute de Butantan,

## POISON ARROWS

or the curare among the Bororo Indians, it paralyses the heart action. One arrow well placed, can kill a tiger; two can kill an elephant, if fresh. But if the virus is old, the agonies may extend to several hours, during which the wound becomes inflamed and of a bluish colour. Often to make the poison even more horrible it is mixed with betel, tobacco, and kidney juices, with pepper and spices; with the poison from scorpions and snakes, with Reinw which contains prussic acid. Also in common with all the Malayan Peninsula, Philippines and the Dutch East is known the famous milky poison (*upas*) of the Ipo or *antiaris toxicaria* and of strychnine (*strychnos tieute*).

The hunters themselves take chances with the poison. Sturdza who has been busy with Mhos and several warriors in the longhouse comes back with a story he has just heard of two Moï hunters who had set a trap for a tiger. One climbed a tree over the trap to await results, the other was to disturb the tiger from its lair. The treed hunter accidentally dropped his quiver full of poison arrows. The hunter on the ground picked it up and taking out a half dozen one by one, shot them up to his colleague in the tree, who caught them nonchalantly.

These Moïs hunters know how to make traps for tigers and panthers, deep holes covered with branches. Even more potent with possibilities of trouble is a poison arrow so set that an animal coming along the trail hits a thread that releases it from the bow. I found travel along the jungle trails fraught with interest. Just to-day, coming to Yen La Me, Antok carefully led us around a trap that was made of a heavy tree branch that will fall upon the passer-by, if he happens to touch the rattan leader artfully placed

## YEN LA ME

near the ground. A wary eye is needed while travelling in Moï-land.

A young hunter passes me while I am busy with the camera. He is riding a small stocky pony which he has caught wild. He rides bareback without bridle and controls the half-wild creature by his knees.

Another activity of the men is catching baby elephants and training them according to their crude standards. Some of them are sold at the elephant market at Kontum destined for Cambodia or Siam, practically the sole article of commerce from the insoumis Moï that finds its way to a foreign market. Lucky is the tribe that finds a white elephant, usually a dirty grey, because of their rarity and a religious significance. They are reserved for royalty and bring a double and treble price.

In the shallow stream nearby two men are fishing with spears and with flat trays. But Mhos says the men leave this type of fishing to the women and rarely bother to fish unless they can empty a pool in a dried up river and catch a lot at a time and all the turtles too.

The Yen La Me people raise a cow or two, but the tall grass, wet season floods and thick woods make the country unsuitable for grazing.

On the outskirts of the village are several cultivated fields. One has some scrubby long-staple cotton bushes. Another small plot has long-leaved tobacco. Another is a large rice field. The rice crop is in. One of the reasons for the recent 'resting' of the villages is the celebration after gathering the crop.

Mhos and Antok have been often missing in the evenings attending feasts at villages not far away. It appears harvest and threshing time is highly popular

## POISON ARROWS

with the young people. The girls especially find it as exciting as our own 'harvest home'. By the light of the moon a group of girls and boys stand facing each other, nose to nose, hands clasping hands, laughing and chatting while trampling the rice under their feet.

The final good time is celebrated by a feast, singing, drinking of the rice alcohol in which all the village shares. Each family at last goes home bearing a ball of new rice as big as a child's head which is saved until the next important journey.

Among the Mois the rice fields produce a glutinous variety of this food staple. Both wet and dry culture is practised. All those I saw have been flooded and the procedure seems to follow the usual method employed throughout this part of the world. Mhos explains that in dry planting the man goes first, punching a row of little holes in the ground with a stick that has several small points of wood hardened in the fire. His wife follows at his heels, puts into each hole grains of rice. These she takes by handfuls from a small bag hung around her neck. She wears only a short strip of cotton from hips to knees, the rest of her body is exposed to the broiling sun. Occasionally one will fasten a large leaf or two on the head or throw a scarf over the back.

When the young sprouts begin after several rains, a lookout or mirador is constructed in a tall tree (or perhaps a platform is built) from which radiate over the field many long strings to which are attached at intervals tassels of bamboo so that when the strings are jerked from the mirador hungry birds will be scared away. The operator works this ingenious scarecrow for several hours and is relieved by another member of the many families

## YEN LA ME

who have an interest in the field. Each family's lot, perhaps as many as sixty, has been apportioned and the area understood although no markings are made.

The rice harvest often yields a crop fifty or sixty times the number of grains planted. When it is ripe for harvesting, the whole village turns out and works systematically, lot after lot, field after field, for two or three days, until the crop is garnered.

As the rice stalks are cut they are gathered in small bundles and tied with a tough grass. Each head of a family receives the sheaves that are his lot and counts them before they are put in the general pile.

When the harvest is done, all the village rests for a few days. Then the threshing begins in the same manner. The whole community goes from lot to lot or house to house, men and women together treading out the kernels with their feet. The rice is then put in long flat trays made by the men. These are taken care of by the women whose job it is to winnow it later. Ultimately it is stored in the village storehouse.

The men weave rattan into side walls, floors and baskets. They also weave the large rattan trays used for cotton and for winnowing rice. They also make the elephant trappings and a variety of articles of bamboo and rattan, two materials in the use of which they are most skilful. They cut down trees and shape the logs for many purposes. They build them into pirogues and the Moï houses. They make thatch of coarse grass for roofing. They make crude utensils for the home and for the field. They raise a little cotton and a little long-leaved tobacco. They hunt for skins; horns and for food.

The Moï love of independence makes him a poor

## POISON ARROWS

servant. Never can he be persuaded to work for more than three or four weeks at a time. He will not work even for himself to provide and store food in order not to starve.

The Moï memory is not good as we consider it—dates and distances and abstract facts, but faithful for the things that make up the hunter's life. He remembers a trail if he has passed over it but once, little details which I might forget if I ever saw them. Without appearing to notice, perhaps travelling fast or chatting, he will see a man at a great distance, a rabbit hiding in the grass, an unusual tree or a strange branch which he can again recognize, a track in the sand, an unhungry tiger resting with watchful eye, a pheasant resting—all without stopping, as part of the day.

As a baby the Moï boy is probably sickly, very thin, by three years of age he has a big belly; between six and ten he is still thin but active. Then he gains some weight but is never fat. His intellectual development is rapid from six to fifteen but with the full maturing of his physique the flower of the intellect has reached its full bloom. Experience continues to add knowledge necessary to his environment, but all observers agree that fifteen years closes the growth of his intellectual powers, and the beauty of youth hardens into the lines of stern adulthood. His hair, which is quite light at birth, brown mixed with chestnut and even yellowish, soon darkens to a dingy black, straight and coarse. Though he may have curly hair, he has no beard. His torso is well-built. His arms and legs straight and muscled for strength. Taller than the Annamite or even the Cambodian he stands about five feet seven inches. His complexion is a dirty yellow, lighter than his neighbours



THE SKILL IN THE BAMBOO  
AND MELL

## YEN LA ME

but proclaiming him a part of the yellow race, and yet I am often struck by the resemblance to the North American Indian. The nose is relatively long and firm with flaring nostrils, the eyes open, chin firm, the lips not full.

Mhos says there is a legend in his tribe that in the old days the Moïs knew how to write on palm leaves. One of the Genie blew a strong wind and blew all the leaves away. Ever since then the Moïs have forgotten how to write.

Since the Moïs have no written language the tribal laws must be handed down by word of mouth. For this the Moï memory is remarkably good. The pholy will repeat long passages which his hearers memorize verbatim, often without understanding their import.

Sturdza at this point extracts a memory from his varied experiences: "I came across a Moï living near the Annamese border who learned to read and write and took up a religious career. He became a bonze (priest). But after several years the urge for the wilds came upon him and he disappeared without a word, left his priestly garment, put on the droy and went back to the tribal village to seek again the maternal home. Seized with a nostalgia to see his mother, he travelled twelve hours a day, not stopping till again he was back in his native woods, hearing his native language and living the primitive life of his clan."

While these people seem peaceable among themselves and go to war only to protect their lands and to punish those who break their tribal laws and the tabus, I am learning more and more not to trust to this apparent amiability. The ease with which they poison their arrows

## POISON ARROWS

and, I suspect, their enemies and the breakers of their tabus, demands that we tread softly among these strange folk and their stranger customs. I have come across hints of practices which have been recorded of other primitive peoples—such as trial by fire and by poison. This last takes the form of forcing the one suspected of witchcraft (i.e., causing disease or disaster) to drink a poisoned potion. If he or she lives, innocence is proven. According to Antok, so far all who have taken the test have been guilty!

Absorbed in the life of this little village I suddenly realize that the sun is dropping. We shall barely get home by nightfall, no flashlight and only one revolver in the party. It is not well to show firearms when visiting an 'unsworn' tribe.

Ballestrier has long since disappeared. His Moi boy reports: "Man tired—go—to sleep."

## CHAPTER XI

### WE DINE AT YEN DANG

**A**T the tram Ballestrier shows us a note which he found stuck in the stockade gate. It is from Varro, the young man whom Ballestrier met further up the lake. He has buried himself in these wilds for the past year! Told B. that he had been in Indo China for eight years.

This jumping off place of the world seems to be quite populated with those who seek an Asian scrap heap for their European civilization.

Varro invites the three of us to dine with him to-night. We send a Moï runner back with an acceptance. The men shave and do such 'sprucing up' as their kit bags afford. I get into a silk dress. We take two rifles, two revolvers, a flashlight and our three boys and set out along the abandoned Route Colonial. It is the first time I have travelled after dark in this savage country.

It is not bad going. A track is still cleared from the engulfing jungle on the right. The marsh grasses are not very high on the lake side. About an hour of this—we hear voices, see lights. Varro is waiting to admit us through his stockade.

A small compound surrounds the usual Moï house.

We climb the ladder. Its veranda commands a view of both lake and jungle. Our host, in an undershirt, pants and brass bangles, offers an apéritif. Shades of Paris Boulevards, it is absinthe!

## POISON ARROWS

Mine is surreptitiously dribbled through the floor. Something to be said in favour of a Moï floor. Two of these and the party is gay. The two chairs are carried within. I am placed in one at a rough board table covered with a plaid cotton cloth, oddments of plates, camp forks and knives, a bottle of wine and four glasses. A cheap glass lamp burns in the centre in a halo of gnats, moths and mosquitoes. Now and then a bat darts overhead bewildered by the light. Tinned soup, tinned salmon, some kind of a wild game ragout, rice, Chinese sweet-meats, wine, white and red, coffee, liqueurs and brandy—truly a Lucullan feast. The picture is somewhat blurred by the limitations of Varro's cook, and the long pauses while the table furniture is removed, presumably washed, and returned.

The talk flows rapidly as does the wine, and the truth is in it. Our host opens the neck of his shirt. One feels he rarely wears anything on that sun-burned, well-built slightly flabby torso but the Moï necklace now visible. He confides in us at great length that he is nobly born, has left France for a wider life. Much grander is this life! Only some of his rapid idiomatic French, his tone now rather thickened, is clear to me. His name is not Varro. He is really a Vernet, descended from the famous Claude Joseph Vernet and his son, Antoine Charles Horace Vernet, who flourished in the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century, and Emile Jean Horace Vernet, his son, all great painters, very great painters! From these he is descended, well perhaps a little over the left, not exactly a bar sinister—somebody's foot slipped perhaps. What is the value of all this *bête* civilization!

“*Parbleu—Pardon, Madame—*”

## WE DINE AT YEN DANG

The other two representatives of an effete civilization nod flushed faces. I rise as elegantly as possible from the untidy board, remark that: "We ladies will now retire to the drawing-room."

Three men struggle to their feet, gallantly bow and settle to deeper confidences. I pass to the veranda not six feet from them and sit on the door sill, not daring to go further into the night of prowling beasts. Varro's voice continues; snatches of phrases reach me.

"Sometimes when on the trail I eat with them. The food is nicely served on leaves. The Moïs sprinkle everything with blood when they can get it fresh. I—rather like it. They put a little blood on their pots and baskets to please the genie—to calm them. Once when I killed a deer they cut the meat up into small pieces which they crushed with their side teeth very well—did not seem to miss the front teeth at all. They ate all of it, even the skin, after rubbing it with blood and the gut juices. It isn't bad you know, instead of cooking.

"And they are very honest. You can leave anything around. Oh, they are real people! They do not care about personal possessions. All is for the family and for the village. The rice fields belong to the families. Of course the chief gets a good share of the rice yield. But nobody starves so long as there is any food.

"It is a great country. Once I went in a pirogue ninety-eight days on the Mother." (the Me Kong.) "All day fighting the current. One mile sometimes a day. In the morning one sees a hill and at night one has not reached it. But that is the life here. It is big—free——"

"*La vie est belle. La vie est belle,*" breaks in Ballestrier.

## POISON ARROWS

"The whole effort of civilized life is useless," says Sturdza dramatically.

"One cannot cheat when one is close with nature." Varro's voice again. "Do you think I am unhappy here alone? With these savage bracelets on my arms?" striking them. "*Je déteste la vie civilisée.* I love the Moï camp—a Rahde blanket."

My eye catches a black spot moving in the dark jungle beyond the palisade which is high but not too high for a big tiger. Moments of strained attention.

Nothing happens.

Ballestrier's voice is saying:

"I was five years in Africa. When I got home; my mother insisted that I marry and picked out the girl. I am not an animal and will choose my wife. So I am here."

"Self respect, self pride," said Sturdza. "I would not marry the *partie* my family wanted me to marry."

Varro continues the theme:

"Those petty people with their petty lives—hypocrisy, deceit! *Nom de guerre!*"

Again he shakes a bracelet of copper wire. His voice goes lower. He thrusts out his hands. "You see that bracelet? I am blood brother to—" (I missed the name of the tribe.) "It's to the north you know. I have mingled my blood with the blood of the chief. From here, near the heart, I gave a few drops and he gave a few drops—in a cup together—and we drank—blood brothers, *sans tache, sans gène*. I have the chief's bracelet. He has mine—a fine clean race. Why should I go back to the sham and cruelty of France? *Sacré!* It is better to get a little drunk—and not care. Out there in the big world I would be called a failure—here I am friends with

## WE DINE AT YEN DANG

the chief and can have my pick of women. I'd rather have that bracelet than a bank account on the Bourse."

The others nod heads, agreeing with this weird testimony of Varro.

Somewhat excitedly, in whispered reiterations, the very queer ones hover over another glass of brandy, telling of anti-social deeds, of outlaw thoughts, the defence mechanism of failure. Drunken, slimy shapes crawl out of the background of their murky past and leer across the table, as the 'Madame' is forgotten by the maudlin group.

Vernet, lost to hope, lazy, defeated, is the most genuine in trying to cheat himself of his white man's heritage. For hours it seems they go on with this macabre dinner. I slap mosquitoes, keep a wary eye on the dark compound through the miasmic veil from the marsh and wave an electric torch now and then; hope that the palisade is secure and the gate fastened against that roaming tiger.

I listen—listen to fragments of talk—a word—a broken sentence, that limn pictures of ugly things, lives removed from their natural environment reverting to primitive acts, to superstitious thoughts. Arjuna, Prince of Good, submerged by the powers of evil—of ignorance, immorality—a leer accompanied by a story, a wink.

"Is it not better, my friend," whispers Varro thickly, harping on a ghost he cannot lay, "to throw to the winds the stupid burden of conforming to the restrictions of silly men back there in Paris and live freely, love freely?"

The sunken eyes of this man not out of his thirties, contract in a sardonic grin.

## POISON ARROWS

"See." He raises his right wrist and again clanks the two metal rings, repeating his refrain for the third time:

"These bracelets make me blood brother to them. I have drunk their blood. They have drunk mine! Have I not done well?" this defiantly. "Never has a white man done this; they are better fellows than we, not hypocrites."

Ballestrier's expression is hard to read; Sturdza is shaking his head up and down, right to left.

"Of course, of course," they murmur. But I sense that each is glad that nothing more alien than alcohol is in his veins.

Suddenly my attention is arrested by Sturdza's voice through the thick haze of rank Moï tobacco. In sibilant whispers comes this:

"I know what you mean, *mais oui*. I too am nobly born. It is dust and ashes—I—I—have had my little episodes. *Oui*, what of it? One must forget. But now I have one whom I love very much—not a woman—no, a sweet youth. Back in Saigon. He lives for me. I live for him. I am father. He is son. —Why not? Who makes these laws that rule society? The savage is wiser. He does not pretend. In my dreams after the pipe, he is always with me in *douce* companionship——" the voice rambles on embroidering the theme.

How much of this is true? How much pipe dreaming? Often when excited after a smoke, Sturdza has spoken of this young Annamite, Em, always with charming, genuine affection.

Ballestrier makes no confessions. He rails against the government. He tells sex stories, himself as hero, frequently interrupted by his exhilarated companions,

## WE DINE AT YEN DANG

each in his own world. Hope, honour, *amour-propre* consigned to the limbo of forgotten things.

I continue to slap mosquitoes and stare into miasmic, portentous darkness, a good backdrop for this unreal scene in the insoumis heart of the Moï country.

At last weary beyond endurance I intrude upon the babbling trio. By the simple act of stepping back through the open door two feet, I produce a simultaneous rising of three slouching figures. Following their insurgent conversation this reaction to French *politesse* is grotesque. However the 'fair sex' might be despised, apparently the first and only member of it in these wilds is to be accorded the usual etiquette.

We prepare to start back to the tram about midnight. Flanked by a European male on either side and one in the rear, each carrying a rifle, and Mhos leading the way with a lantern, the other two behind Varro with another lantern, I am escorted back along the jungle track several miles to the haven of the tram.

Varro, who is invited to remain till daylight, stretches himself out on the back veranda with the boys.

I proceed to my lair with what privacy dim light and mosquito netting afford, slide into my sleeping bag, soon to be unconscious of Sturdza on a mat in the middle of the room and Ballestrier in blankets at the other end—a strange combination of isolation and intimacy preserved, so far, by the mental barrier which I have established with these survivors of European civilization. Asia the untamed, the unhurried, has burnt her mark upon two, perhaps three, of them.

## CHAPTER XII

### WE VISIT THE BIHS

I HAVE been hearing of the Bih tribe to the Northwest who live in the water country. They are not accessible by roads even in the dry season. I prepare to make a short expedition to visit them; invite Ballestrier to accompany us, not caring to leave him in possession of my luggage, note-books and collections—and the mirador.

Early one morning we start out in two pirogues from Ben Tour, a collection of grass houses on a swampy bank. With four boys at the paddles and Ballestrier taking an occasional hand, we explore up a stream, a branch of the Ea Krong, that never has carried Europeans; has never known a surveyor's tripod. Its glassy surface reflects the burning sunrays like a floor of brass. There is no escape from the relentless glare beating into one's eyes, stunning the brain to a daze. Automatically, hour after hour one endures it, endures the cramped muscles, the inferno of mid-day heat.

Crouching in the bottom of the dug-out one sees through the heat-maze, as through a wavering curtain of light, the life on this tropical river. Crocodiles doze on the banks, half-submerged; or float log-like, staring winkless eyes at us. Reeds, water hyacinths, in places low growth and tangled water roots, but no tall trees in this

## WE VISIT THE BIHS

seemingly endless stretch of open country where the rank grasses of the pampa wave in a purple shimmer. Myriad channels cut it as the Krong and all its branches and tributaries find a devious way to the Me Kong, 'twenty-one sleeps to the West'. Very confusing to know just where we are. Mhos says that Krong means river. There are two rivets, Krong Nha (Great Male) and Krong Ana (Great Female) which is also called Krong Mö. The Me Kong, Mother of Waters, rises in Thibet, separates Laos and Siam, rambles through Cambodia and seeps through its delta in Cochin China to the Sea. Mother Me Kong, destructive in flood, in gentle moods is irresistible, almost disappearing in places during the dry season, it is the bestower of abundance to all the vast regions through which it passes.

Towards late afternoon, we turn a bend and come full upon a group of men making a boat on the shore. Mhos says it is the Bih village of Buon Trap. Some large trees on higher ground give shade to the workers. Of course they must have boats in this flooding country. The young men are shaping from a large log a m'rang (pirogue), forty-five feet long and two and a half feet wide. Each is very skilful with the Moï axe, his only tool. This he uses also for lumbering and splitting the necessary logs for buildings. Uses it for attack and defence when occasion requires. Like the others I have seen, the blade is set at right angles to the handle. The axes vary in length from twelve to seventeen inches, being about two inches wide at the broader end.

The head and sensitive face of one boat builder seems

## POISON ARROWS

almost feminine. His hair, like all Bih men as well as women, is long and knotted in a loose coil at the nape of the neck. His manners are gentle, his movements graceful, his smile sweet and slow with a hint of melancholy. In our country he might be a poet or a dreamer. But a glance at the slim strength of the torso, like that of a young Greek gladiator, shows power and endurance. Even the burly, long-boned chief Gedac, with a Falstaffian paunch who soon appears on the trail from the village, seems gentle in spite of his small shrewd eyes and a scar across the nose that tells of battle. I feel these people would use the axe or shoot a poison arrow at one with the same gentle, leisurely manners and nonchalant smile. It seems a tribal characteristic.

I land and approach these three young men who are wearing the usual gee-string and anklets. They do not respond to my greeting but do not seem unfriendly. They look at me, allow me to fuss with the little black box in my hands, to stand beside them while Sturdza takes our photos. All activity is accepted with indifference. Their reaction to the first white woman they have ever seen has the same lack of interest as when one hears an unknown language to which one has no clue, one makes no attempt to understand. Their amiable placidity holds no security. Experience makes one beware.

I realize that the fatuous grin is caused by the grinding down of the front teeth which all the Moïs in the Taclac and Krong River regions practice. A hunter I saw using his archaic crossbow and poison arrow smiled all the time except when actually aiming. A youth is going through this dreadful business of tooth breaking. Sturdza watches the operation and reports that all the

SHATTERED GLASS  
SHATTERED GLASS  
SHATTERED GLASS  
SHATTERED GLASS  
SHATTERED GLASS

YOUNG MEN  
APPROACH THE LAND

## WE VISIT THE BIHS

incisors and canines, six above, six below, are broken off and filed with a soft stone. Only the molars are left to do the business of chewing. This painful procedure seems to be done in this tribe as a coming-of-age-puberty-ceremony. The survivor is then reckoned a man and a warrior. The boy's head is held firmly on the ground and the pholy, in his priestly capacity, breaks off one tooth after the other between two stones.

The result is bleeding gums and lips and a set of ragged incisors which the 'brave one' will grind down to smoothness at his leisure.

While one of these young men poses for his picture and proudly shows me his dental stubs in a mouth red from chewing the betel nut, I ask through Mhos: "How do you eat meat?"

A surprised look that I should question this sartorial elegance, accompanied the answer: "Plenty of back teeth."

They accompany us to a prosperous-looking village in higher ground about half a mile away. On the right I notice a small platform raised three feet on bamboo posts. On it is a little rice, a banana, a pinch of tobacco. It is a spirit table, where food is always offered by the Moïs to propitiate the many spirits of trees, stones, animals, humans that live in the ether of their animistic religion.

A woman, knee deep in water, is fishing with a wide net held flat by a wooden edge. Suddenly with a graceful gesture she swoops under a shoal of small fish and lifts them out of the water and into her basket.

The women of this Bih village are not shy. They seem more interested in us than the men. Gedac leads us to

## POISON ARROWS

the centre of the village where stands his wife, the chiefess, a *petite*, upright figure in which is dignity and assurance. She wears only a short skirt, a seven strand necklace of beads and very large brass hoops in her ears, the lobes of which have been stretched so that the hoops rest upon her shoulders. Sometimes the diameter of the opening is stretched to four inches and the belief is current that an unmarried woman will never find a husband if the string of flesh is broken. In no other tribe have I seen these huge earrings, reminiscent of South India. Later the chiefess enriches her costume with coils around her wrists and ankles. Two other matriarchs of the tribe, similarly attired, stand nearby. No Roman matrons could have displayed greater dignity or self respect than emanated from these half-naked, brass-hung women. Erect, head back, they face their world with assurance. Fear is not in them.

Gedac seizes the opportunity of strange guests to order a *mnam*, a drinking feast. As food and raiment, not silver, is the form of barter, a goodly number of mirrors and matches and bright red cotton for weaving, are received amiably. In fact, all seems peaceful and lighthearted under the blistering sun. No spirits are acting contrary, no tabu pokes its nose about. The village is delighted to drink from the jar unexpectedly in the middle of the afternoon.

Runners are despatched to another village for the gongs that have been loaned for a wedding. In about an hour they arrive per man-back. Meanwhile a great forty-thieves jar, partly filled with rice mash, is carried into the longhouse by two stalwart youths after they have half filled it with water. This they transport from



JOHNSON  
JOHN D. JOHNSON  
JOHNSON SHOWS HIS DENTAL STUDY

## POISON ARROWS

paper, and of throat swallowing to simulate a copious draught of this crude, offensive stimulant.

It is curious how every type of culture seeks and finds some release from the 'reality' of everyday existence. Nature is liberal with her consciousness-changing plants. Man acquires their secrets; he extracts, brews, ferments or smokes them—and pays the price.

These primitive people are on the way out. Besides alcohol, and latterly opium, the land shrinkage is a factor. More and more their vast territory of mountains, plateau and flooding lowlands is lessening. The conquering French have already pushed their *petits frères* back hundreds of miles. Motor roads connect rubber plantations to civilization's network. The Moï nature does not adapt to transplanting or servitude. Like the North American Indian, they are following the long trail to extinction.

The unafraid intelligence of the Bih chiefess brought out the idea that the Moïs do not understand the biological aspects of the sex relation. They think that the woman makes the child, which she gets from the spirits while bathing in the river, or walking through the forest. Like the Trobrianders and other primitive tribes where descent is matrilineal, the unmarried girls are careful not to remain long in the water, although it is recognized that the spirits do not act unless a man has paved the way. Under such circumstances certain methods suggestive of our birth control are used by the unmarried girls. The breeding and birth of animals seems to be well understood but the human being is set apart as of a different order.

The descent of property through the distaff side is a



APSARAS ETCHING BY BEN SIEBERT  
OF DANCING MAIDENS

Every inscrutable smile—is a curtain concealing  
unmentionable delights

## WE VISIT THE BIHS

logical sequence. In order to claim paternity, the husband changes his name when the first child is born (in some tribes when the first son is born) and again when the first grandchild is born, so that he is known as father of (the child's name) or father's father of so and so. Ben Methoût means village of the Father of Thoût.

Another chief, Mablaik, enters the longhouse. With him is a chiefess, probably an aunt of Gedac's wife, and four children, one still suckling. Mablaik gives out tobacco, a present to each of us. Everyone smokes from little bamboo pipes. To be sociable I buy a new pipe for four piastres and surreptitiously crumble a cigarette into the bowl. Moï tobacco, like their alcohol, is unadulterated and rank. The drinking goes on methodically. In stalks a tall handsome savage, wearing ivory ear plugs, hair knot, gec-string, bamboo pipe, and knife. The chief salutes him with both hands, says: "Sa sam lay" (good-bye, good luck) and the youth departs to go on some mission for him.

Bamboo is used for nearly everything, even for cooking. When necessary the Moï cuts a piece of green bamboo close to a joint, puts rice or other food in, closes it and cooks it in a fire. Perhaps once a year, during the dry season, a pedlar from Annam or Cambodia penetrates this country, or a few things they want, salt, iron, brass wire, will drift in from the elephant convoys of tribes who make expeditions to Ben Hoa, exchanging ivory and deer skins for gongs and rice jars.

Tiring of this pursuit of information concerning the Bihs, I notice that Ballestrier has slipped out of the longhouse. Through an opening in the wall near by I glimpse him disappearing beyond a small building set on

## POISON ARROWS

stilts, which is the village rice store house. He is not alone. A slim young girl is with him, her hair done in the maiden's knot. That Ballestrier should pursue his amorous adventures is of small matter. That he does not run up against a tabu is important. I suggest to Sturdza that it is a long way back to the tram and it may be well to leave Buon Trap while the leaving is comfortable and will he please collect Ballestrier before anything untoward happens. Sturdza murmurs under his breath what sounds like "quel sale bete"; perhaps I did not hear correctly.

Antok is dispatched for our gallant. Adieux are made. Regretfully I part with the little chiefess. I give her a small powder box with a mirror in the lid and promise to come again. We finally get started along the trail to the pirogues a half mile away, escorted by the two chiefs and a group of warriors—but no Ballestrier. When the delay is becoming awkward and I am debating leaving one of the pirogues and departing, Antok appears to report that Monsieur will be along presently. I register a vow to take him on no more trips. This vow is kept though not as I originally intended.

Antok is facing me at the stern paddle. I ask him what birds are here in these vast stretches of grass and marsh. He does not know the French names for loon, blue bird, pheasant, dove, nor the pagoda bird, which is black with orange and red wings, and is a snake eater. Sturdza gets the words in Moï via the Annamese of Mhos. By the same three-cornered method we learn that the morning glory and very small violets abound, and on the high islands occasionally a cubu tree (piuon).

"Antok, do you know about America where the lady comes from?" asks Sturdza. A shake of the head.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BACKTRACK

THAT night I go to the mirador, in spite of Ballestri's subtle efforts to prevent it.

"Madame is very tired, does not look well. I will go and report what is happening."

But Madame elects to go with Sturdza and the two boys and two rifles. The old horse is no more a horse but a bloated smelly banquet for my lord, the tiger. Indications are that the tiger struck down his dinner the day before, took just a tid-bit from the haunch, and is waiting for it to acquire even more enticing odours. I debate spending the night on the mirador, but memories of such a vigil in India, mosquitoes, fatigue, frustration, also very present sensations of discomfort from the 'python', make imperative the decision to go back to the tram for rest and medicine. I decide to take the chance and return at dawn.

The hours that ensue are fantastic. Collywobbles and fever for me; collywobbles and torture for Sturdza. Yesterday I gave him all the remaining dross. It was not much, but should have lasted him for a couple of days. The runner has not returned with the opium and I suspect never will come. Ballestri, rolled in his blankets, is the only one who pretends to sleep this night. His conscience is not of a delicate variety.

## BACKTRACK

At 4 a.m. Sturdza's haggard face wavets towards me through my mosquito net. It grows large and small as I try to look at him with fever-distorted vision.

He begs for opium. I explain that I gave him all of it upon his promise to make it last. He has been cutting down a great deal and I believed he could do it. But he has been unable to withstand the temptation to nibble and it is all gone—gone since morning. He thought to have a good bit and then to do without it. He is shaking in every muscle; every nerve shrieking.

I capitulate.

"Call Mhos! Send him to the nearest village that has some elephants. Tell him we must start back at daylight. Tell Antok to begin packing up at once." Sturdza staggers towards the back veranda where the boys sleep.

So, the wicked is to be allowed to flourish as the bay tree. Virtue plus a 'python' and minus opium is routed. Ballestriér falls heir to the tram, extra provisions, the tiger.

I feel very far away, directing that clumsy person, myself, to get dressed and pack personal belongings. I take more quinine, Sun Mixture, and arsenic and go on with the fantasy.

When dawn streaks through the blackness and Sturdza is out of the tram, I go over to Ballestriér in his corner, who, pretence or not, now awakes.

I tell him we are leaving. He expresses great regret. "If I get your tiger, I will give you the skin."

I thank him sweetly, give him title to the government sixty piastres bounty for which he has been scheming.

"Now, my friend, cannot you be a little generous?"

## POISON ARROWS

Give me a small quantity of opium to help Baron Sturdza get back to Ben Methoût?"

For a moment his eyelids flicker; I think compassion may touch him. Then he stiffens, perhaps at thought of the tiger; he denies knowing what I can mean. There is nothing to do but pray for the elephants.

Hours drag by. At last when the sun is blazing high in the sky, Mhos returns with two skittish young pachyderms, all he has been able to get. Hope is held out that another can be obtained at Yen La, eight miles down the trail. The luggage is piled on one and I mount the other crowding the legs into the worst hunting howdah I have yet seen.

Necessity makes one cruel. I cannot walk this morning—hardly able to stand—and my elephant cannot carry us both. The other creature is overloaded with our luggage. Poor Sturdza perforce must walk—or die.

"Don't worry, Madame. I am in hell anyway."

It is a desperate departure.

Ballestrier waves good-bye as he closes the stockade gates, a smug smile on his face which he no longer troubles to make sympathetic.

Hours pass in the torturing pace of the pack train. The sun beats mercilessly. The world is seen in a red haze. I wonder if it is a sunstroke. My legs seem to be paralysed. Sturdza's face is brick red and he babbles at times as he drags himself along.

"Got to walk—got to walk," he mutters. His eyes glazed—face purple—step after step shows his will to live, to get to the next village and we hope another elephant.

In this agonizing march, an hour, two hours drag by.

# BALI

SCALE 10 miles - 1 inch

SEA  
JAVA

## MAP OF BALI

Key:  
— main roads  
— other roads

### DISTANCES.

Breiteling — Maendek	43 K.M.	Kloengkong — Barcine —	74 K.M.
Moendek — Den Pasar	111 K.M.	Kloengkeru — Gelie	1 K.M.
Recheling — Sinceradia — Boehemen —	117 K.M.	Kloengkeru — Lampakirky	1 K.M.
Tahaman — Den Pasar	40 K.M.	Den Pasar via Reng	0.4 K.M.
Den Pasar — Blahkue — Den Pasar	38 K.M.	Tampakirung — Kintamara	0.8 K.M.
Den Pasar — Tampakirung	32 K.M.	Den Pasar — Kintamara via Tam	0.7 K.M.
Den Pasar — Gamar — Kloengkong		Kintamara — Singaraja / Puleting	32 K.M.

one Kilometer is about 0.6 mile



## BACKTRACK

The heat steadily increases under a pitiless sun. Then we come to a strip of woods. While a more difficult trail, at least the scorching glare abates. I turn to look at Sturdza staggering along.

"Ballestrier," I think, "you wily Frenchman, let the torments you have caused boomerang upon you."

Then presto! Comes a trumpet from the pack elephant, a response from my mount who begins to gyrate alarmingly. As he turns head to tail I catch a glimpse of a plunging, fear-crazed beast lashing through the thick woods, scraping off our precious belongings, scattering them afar with awful creakings and crackings. Smashing the howdah as he dashes helter skelter into the bush amid fearful crashing of branches and snapping of rattan ropes.

Man's will triumphs. The comac pluckily sticks to his neck and with a sharp pointed stick belabours the crazy thing's head. He finally subdues that cavorting creature.

After a long delay the remnants of our belongings are picked up and repacked, while my mount mills restlessly round and round ready to bolt at the least provocation, and two very nervous creatures are again prodded along the trail.

I never knew what startled our temperamental transportation. Even the native Moïs occasionally met with have to keep far away from our elephants. They are suspicious of any human not belonging to the village in which they live.

Interminable hours of gris (go) and zouk (stop) and of discouraging elephant ticks at last bring us to Yen La at high noon and not soon enough for either of us.

As for Sturdza—no one will ever know what heights

## POISON ARROWS

or depths of heroic will were called upon to make that march possible for him. He is muttering—"must walk—must walk—step forward, step forward . . ." when I dismount and taking him by the shoulder shake him back to realities and the need to undertake some interpretation and finesse to obtain a mount for him. His fortitude and grim determination win my admiration.

Two fine specimens of Mnong warriors, the usual gec-string supplemented by broad leather belts studded with metal disks, expertly equip a third elephant for him.

As none of the travelling cages have a covering, my endurance is down to the zero mark. Fearing a sun stroke, I manage to convey to these savage gentlemen the need to rig up a bamboo skeleton top and to fasten my water-proof cape on it as some protection for the hottest day I encounter in Indo China. It takes us six hours to go fifteen miles that day. We pass a party of warriors with cross bows and poison arrows; also men and women carrying heavy back loads of wood and huge bundles of grass for roofs stacked in the Moī basket.

When in due course, with forced marches we arrive at the turbulent Da Ricou it seems like getting home. Two pirogues fastened together await us to ferry our impedimenta and a blessed old Ford soon receives it and us.

It seems like an apotheosis of a nightmarish fight against human frailty. Sturdza's orchids, which in all his distress he never failed to augment, bulge and wave from tonneau to radiator. On the running board are oncedium and cymbidium. A new phalaenopsis, the most precious, is on the seat between us. Miltonia, catalaya, denbro-

## BACKTRACK

bium drape the hood. Orchids at home worth five dollars a spray, or a piece, here give me no emotion but boredom.

While the decrepit vehicle, hanging together by a miracle, is being loaded, another surprise arrives. The elephants are being paid off, also our boys—to-night I shall sleep in a real bed at Bungalow Nicot—and Mhos especially seems eager to return to his people.

I notice that Antok says something to Sturdza which causes that gentleman annoyance. The reason for this now rushes up, flings enthusiastic arms around the neck of my already distraught companion and plants several kisses in the region of his ears. Gallantly he gives her a feeble peck on her forehead and pours out some rapid Annamese which causes the congaï to withdraw a few feet looking puzzled. Clad in the usual black trousers and long straight coat, her slim length is not unattractive, but her face is ravaged by too much climate or living. Evidently she had come out along the jungle track, expecting a much warmer welcome. Antok's remark explains the tender relationship.

"She know Monsieur—before. No matter, I will take care of her."

Innocently I ask: "Who is she, Sturdza?" to which came the answer of mingled annoyance and embarrassment.

"Oh, just a woman I met last time. These congaï are so effusive and they have no sense. Do not understand European ways. Should not have spoken to me before you. She is living with Antok now. The car is ready, Madame. Shall we start?"

She is obviously much better class than our Moï

## POISON ARROWS

soldier boy. A twinge of compunction prompts me to say: "Should we not take her back?"

"No, indeed. There is not room and it would not do. When she gets tired of it, Antok will see that she gets back to Ben Methoût." And so we leave her standing forlornly in the road at Bonne Deun. For the millionth time I am glad I was born an American.

At dusk we draw up at the R.O. sign where I leave Sturdza to the solace of the pipe. Soon I am revelling in a hot bath and offering thanks to the Nicots for having so comfortable a trading post.

Three days of rest and food regime subdue the fever but it seems imperative to consult Sturdza's doctor friend about the 'python'.

The voluminous notes and limited wearing apparel are packed, the motor ready for the next step back to civilization. Life with Sturdza has reverted to the formalized intimacy of early days. But there is an under-current of uneasiness I do not understand. Now it is out. A knock on my door. Sturdza appears.

"Madame, before we leave here I feel I must say something. I—I have not been . . . there is something that happened at the tram. I was not quite true to Madame's interests. Not to Mummy's idea of a gentleman—" Since the regular opium habits are restored, Mummy has come back into the stream of talk.

"What is it, Sturdza? About Ballestrier?"

"Yes, I—"

"And the tiger?"

"Ah, Madame suspects! But she does not know that the tiger came to the bait that last night, and Ballestrier knew this and promised me half of the bounty and some

## BACKTRACK

ammunition to Antok if we would not tell you about the tiger. It was your right to know. Ballestrier got the tiger that very day. But you will never get the skin. Nor will I get the money—that does not matter. I need the money but I did not keep quiet because of that. Madame believes me?"

I let him reveal his iniquity to the full. Did not then tell him that I already knew. But that the desire to murder a glorious creature for its skin as a trophy was not so great as the need to salvage a human wreck, in fact two human wrecks!

"Of course I believe you. But how did you find this out, Sturdza?"

"She returned. She has news that came via the jungle telegraph. She told me and Antok is furious because he has not been given any ammunition either. Ballestrier has gone to live with Varro. Two of a kind!"

"Do not worry about it. That page is closed. I knew at the tram I could have had the tiger by staying even another day. But, you, Baron Sturdza; I knew you must get back to Ben Methoût. Is it not so?"

"Madame, you thought of me," he whispers, all aflame. He seizes my hand, bends over it, implanting an ardent kiss upon the back.

Mellowed, we tuck in on the back seat for a long day's drive to Nhatrang, and the railroad to Saigon.

The next night at Beau Rivage, relaxed from the strain of the past weeks, we have a gay little dinner. I order *haut sauterne* of a good vintage to celebrate a successful return from the Moï country. I become socially companionable. We chat about our motor ride and visit to a Cham ruin near by, the temple of Po Nagar of the

## POISON ARROWS

Twelfth Century. We recall the beautiful scene, the little harbour cluttered with fishing boats, the air so clean, the sparkling lights on the black upjutting rocks and rolling sea. Also the temple there, its pillars reduced to their brick foundations and the shrine surrounding a statue full breasted with gilded face and straight eyes.

Sturdza had remarked: "The Chams were Aryan so would not have slant eyes. But they must have embraced some of the Annamese forms. This temple is a curious combination of Chinese and Dravidian architecture."

I had lighted four candles at the shrine of a Buddha with slant eyes and Hindu armlets, and given a piastre to a yellow-robed priest who told my fortune in Annamese. He had taken several bamboo sticks brown with age, shook them out of a container one by one, and beat a gong, *tang! tang!*; Sturdza had interpreted the usual ritual patter.

Sturdza now tells me something he did not interpret in the afternoon.

"Madame, the bonze said, 'you will be married again or have a lover soon'."

This strange mixture of surprises that constitutes Sturdza can be very companionable when one is not trying to accumulate information. In a burst of confidence I tell him of the *Chère inconnue* notes slipped under my door and of another note that happened again last night and I ask gaily if this is a local habit.

Sturdza does not respond to my mood. Becomes silent. Finally says seriously:

"Madame, those notes, that fellow, the other fellows—it is not necessary to consider them. If Madame wishes any diversion, I am here. I have kept silent, but now

## BACKTRACK

perhaps it is different. Yes, perhaps? And everyone thinks, Why not? If Madame will honour me, I am entirely at her command."

And so the merry-go-round at Nhatrang is back at its starting point. The thing we came to do is done after a fashion—perhaps enough to give to the armchair traveller a sketch of what a survival of primitive, matriarchal civilization looks like—and this unpredictable, handicapped man has helped gallantly. Yes, the mood is distinctly light hearted. Is the pervading psychological virus beginning to work? I rehearse the old stuff but this time with no pedantry and some coquetry:

"No, Sturdza. It is not different. Don't let us spoil this. You know I want to take you to Angkor. It is not what everyone in this crazy country thinks. It is what we think. What we know. I feel very kindly to you, Baron Sturdza. You have been valiant these last few weeks. You have kept your promise and now we are out of those wilds again I feel like jubilating. Have a glass of champagne and we shall drink to the health of the—the Moïs, and be glad we are still above our six feet by two of earth."

An hour later we entrain for Saigon. The trip to a strange country and stranger human beings becomes a memory film waiting until it can be flashed upon my tropic screen.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PNOM-PENH—WE GO DEMOCRATIC

IT was Sturdza's idea that we could quite easily go to Pnom-Penh by bus and all the way to Angkor for that matter. He had done it several times. I would get a better idea of the people. It would cost ten piastres for us both instead of twenty to forty dollars gold for a motor.

Lured by this democratic picture I agree. Three days of rushing about in Saigon, forwarding luggage to Singapore, getting photographs developed, packing and shipping home trophies from Moï-land, with many promises but small results from the dreamer who means well, and I now find myself rattling through the deserted streets of Saigon at four o'clock in the morning, again intent upon the bizarre rendezvous with my erratic guide on the front seat of a decrepit bus. The half-asleep *pousse-pousse* runner misses his turning and brings up at a blank wall. Has to retrace his steps while the minutes fly by and finally lands his frantic fare at the bus terminal ten minutes after the scheduled departure. Sturdza greets me calmly:

"Do not worry, Madame. I have tipped the driver to wait."

The bus, already bulging with a full complement of sleepy natives encrusted with personal luggage, holds

## PNOM-PENH

scant welcome but permits us to solve the problem of squeezing two more to the three already beside the driver on a seat built to accommodate four. The registered capacity is for twenty persons. Thirty-five are already aboard with an indescribable collection of belongings—the usual bags and bundles also birdcages, bicycles, prams, and mattresses. They perch perilously upon the top of the bus and cram every available nook of the interior that is not occupied by a human. I am becoming not only more acquainted with the travelling proletariat but also what it travels with. Incessant talking, incessant chewing of smelly cakes, oranges or the saliva-provoking betel, characterize an amiable and patient crowd.

We obligingly wait for two more belated passengers, and the departure is affected a half-hour later. The top-heavy vehicle, a ten-year-old Ford model, creaks and clatters through the silent streets out to the Route Colonial for a three hundred kilometre stretch to Pnom-Penh. We sway perilously on the dark but fortunately level road as the driver tries to maintain a forty mile an hour speed. Jammed in between a fat priest and a youth clinging to the running board, our chauffeur manipulates his wheel and gears with difficulty and constitutes no mean hazard to the safety of the trip.

Shakespeare's sapient lines are useful:

'Cowards die many times before their deaths.  
The valiant never taste of death but once'.

I withdraw attention from the transportation and focus upon Sturdza. The mood is gay, vacational and relaxing. Adventure is before us. We are embarked upon

## POISON ARROWS

a week of novelty and mystery—if we ever get there intact. His response to my mood is not frank American comradeship but continental personal awareness held in suspension for future developments. On the surface the guide-to-his-client conversation flows rapidly, stimulated by a 4 a.m. pipe. Beneath run subtle interchanges that flavour a morning of unaccustomed contact with bodies and habits of an alien country. It is difficult to be entirely impersonal to someone whose leg from hip to ankle is decidedly encroaching; whose arm is encircling one's back and whose voice is not three inches from one's ear; even though such intimacy is involuntary, owing to the mathematical law that two bodies cannot occupy the same space.

"Ah, *chère* Madame, you ask about the Khmers. Like the Chams they show Hindu influence in the monuments they have left. Some think they came from the Ganges valley. They are supposed to be entirely wiped out but I think they are still to be found in Cambodia very much deteriorated probably from epidemic and changes of climate. Country became deforested, the climate changed, floods came, fever started; only a deplorable remnant left now. And, of course, the opium."

I puzzle over this last. Pigeonhole it for future elucidation. Sturdza's expression denotes some vivid sly thoughts. He continues his theme:

"Some authorities place the Khmers as authochtöne—aborigines, you know. They were the first to be civilized of all the inhabitants of Indo China during the early cycles of the Christian era and therefore belong to a brachycephalic race. This idea is borne out by the knowledge that the short skulled people are more easily

## PNOM-PENH

civilized than the long skulled, for the Khmers were really isolated among tribes that remained savages and whose skull was long.”

“Wait a minute, Sturdza. Does brachycephalous mean having a short skull like the Khmers and that the Cambodian to-day has a short skull with the back very flat? And does dolichocephalous mean a long skull, like the Moï, with the back of the head relatively pronounced? Yes? Proceed, Mr. Professor.”

“It is believed that the ancestors of some of the people of Laos adjacent came from Lhasa; others were strong clever men from China.

“The religion now is a mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism, as it is in all these countries that are now called Malay. . . . It is known that in about four hundred A.D. a Brahmin family held the kingship of Cambodia and for nearly three hundred years it interchanged commerce and culture with China. Then about seven hundred A.D. it became very powerful under Malay influence, the centre of that empire then being in Sumatra.

“Tavada Nagdon, or Angkor, was established as the capital about the ninth century and flourished mightily until the thirteenth when the Thai, the ancient Siamese, conquered it. Beautiful Angkor was sacked and the inhabitants killed; one time as many as thirty thousand were killed, it is said, and another time there were no less than ninety thousand prisoners taken. Then later came the attacks of the Karens, their kingdom was called Tchen-Tcheng, and in thefourteenth century the Laotians finished them.

“Years passed and the place became holy. Nothing disturbed its silence but the wild beasts. Nature spread

## POISON ARROWS

out her lavish growth, smothered it with a mantle of green, wreaked a final vengeance. It was swallowed up, forgotten."

Partly hypnotized by the flow of his voice, I am far away with him in the mysterious sweep of the jungle, holding in its indifferent grasp the marvellous record of a vanished people. At a particularly vicious jerk of the bus when it seems as though the centre of gravity can no longer be maintained, and a mess of humans and encumbrances must seek a new level in the ditch, I lay a steady hand on Sturdza's knee.

Sudden silence—for a long moment there is no English dominating the uncomprehended chatter of these Cambodian magpies around me. I remove the hand and slue an eye to the left to catch a glimpse of the face so close behind mine. It wears an expression I cannot fathom. My continental plummet has not line enough to reach the bottom of it. I say hastily:

"Go on Sturdza—about Angkor. I know that some Portuguese and Spanish explorers in fifteen hundred and seventy found this great buried city in the jungle. Some writers think that the Khmers' inability to survive is partly due to the mould and rot of the Buddhistic system; to their vows of celibacy and begging, and living on the community, which robbed them of their virility for competition and warfare. What do you think?"

Still with that subtle undercurrent came the reply:

"Perhaps, Madame. Brahmanism was the natural religion of the Khmers for nine centuries. Then the saffron robe of Buddhism began to claim devotees. Not only in the cities but hidden in the jungle villages monasteries arose and the thousand-petalled lotos

## PNOM-PENH

flowers replaced the bloody sacrifices to Siva, the Destroyer.” In a low whisper, he added significantly: “You will see them at Angkor Wat, the statues of Buddha, strangely mixed up with the Apsaras and carvings of the Hindu mythology.”

“But, Baron Sturdza, I do not see the beautiful religion of the Master of Kapilavastu that way. The lotos is the symbol of the soul’s enlightenment unfolding petal after petal, of satori, the opening of the third eye of wisdom. ‘The unenlightened man is blindness wandering in mists.’\* It preaches the art of concentration, that the half is greater than the whole.

“Within to sound the deeps of waters of Mystery  
“Without to wander at will through the portals of  
concentration.

It teaches impersonality. One of the mantras is:

“I have no parents; I make the heaven and the earth  
my parents.  
“I have no magic power; I make truth my magic  
power.  
“I have no laws; I make strength my law.  
“I have no miracles; I make the one law my miracle.  
“There is Law; and what I call ‘I’ is inviting.

“Also one of the precepts to the disciple is: ‘One must work to eat; no labour, no food. An idler is a blot on the page of a disciple on the Path (Way)’. Surely these people must have become very decadent.”

\* *The Garden of Vision* by L. Adams Beck.

## POISON ARROWS

"That is it, Madame. They became lazy, debased, emasculated. They took much opium to make them dream."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"You will see at Angkor." Just that said Sturdza and no more.

The mid-morning sun is beating upon us. Every few kilometres we stop at some Chinese village of white walls and palms to let someone off or on, principally on. Now we number forty. The sagging springs bump together at any roughness in the road which is fortunately in good repair. The Route Colonial passes through a prosperous panorama of plantations—betel palms, sugar palms, rubber trees, tobacco, castor-oil, manioc and rice, rice and yet more rice.

"The Khmers," continues Sturdza, "still rule at Pnom-Penh, through their descendants the Cambodians. It is the capital of Cambodia and the king is under the protection of the French, of course. They conquered it in eighteen hundred and eighty-four, but do not interfere very much so long as they get certain revenues and the king keeps within certain regulations. There are some beautiful buildings, the palace and temples and the Museum Albert Sarrault and library. Of course at Angkor you will get the best impression of the genius of these people.

"The present day Cambodians wear a straight piece of cloth wrapped around the hips and legs for a skirt, called sampot for a man and sarong for a woman, and usually, unless the weather is too hot, a loose coat of linen or satin. Sometimes the men wear the loose Chinese trousers. The coarse black hair for boys is

## PNOM-PENH

shaved in the back, with a long front forelock usually flopping down into the eyes. The bonzes, of course, shave all the head and you can always tell them by the way they wrap their yellow cotton strip around the body from shoulder to feet with the arms naked. They overrun this country. It is hard on the poor farmer."

"Yes," I comment, "in India the Buddhic priest wears the same saffron robe and in Japan and in all the world where he has penetrated with his begging-bowl. What does 'Nha-qúe' mean, Sturdza?"

"'Nha-qúe' is a native of Indo China and the native coin is called Sapèqúe. But Madame need not worry about that. I will save you the trouble of dealing with shopkeepers. There are exquisitely carved things in silver, a speciality of Pnom-Penh. I will take you to a good shop. You will buy cigarette boxes and Buddhas for your friends."

A suspicion that my guide will profit also by such purchases does not disturb me. Much oriental travel accustoms one to the practice of cumshaw. My attention is diverted from Sturdza's fluent comments on Cambodians while I remove from my ribs a too-angular elbow of a skinny boy hovering largely in space between me and the chauffeur. It is brought back sharply by Sturdza's remark:

"Perhaps you may think people are pretty easy going here in their personal lives, but the families stick together and sodomy is rare even though you do see a good deal of petting among boys—holding hands and arms around the neck. There is a lot more of that among the Annamites."

I remember Sturdza's ramblings at that fantastic

## POISON ARROWS

dinner with Varro, in the wild country, and venture a question:

"Did you not say that the boy who lives with you, Em, will be in Phnom-Penh?"

"Yes. He is there on a little business since two days. He is waiting for me. Em, Em bay, that means younger brother. He is very sweet and intelligent, not a nhos (peasant) but gently born. I have educated him." Abruptly his tone changes, was it intentional? "Ah, Madame, we have come to the bac."

Before us rolls an ugly current of water, the Me Kong, perhaps a half mile wide. Two ropes tied to the bank and a group of natives on either side are trying to manœuvre a frail raft made of logs so that we can be ferried across. An abandoned bus half submerged gives mute testimony to our probable fate. Nobody budges from his particular few inches of space, knowing well that he would never be able to retrieve them. So down the steep bank we carom, by sheer luck onto the raft, which all but sinks beneath us. This activity dislodges a bicycle and a baby's pram from the top. They come hurtling into the water, accompanied by loud cries from their owners and equally vociferous remarks from the interested neighbours.

I confess that Mr. William Shakespeare's philosophy has to be invoked again while we welter through that Asian river. Finally as by a miracle we achieve the opposite bank. Peace, about as quiet as a monkey cage, seems to be restored when the driver responds to a signal from yet another would-be passenger who waves an umbrella. Attached to the sunshade is the person of a Catholic priest whose long black cassock covers the

## PNOM-PENH

usual ample rotund form. Even the Cambodians question how this two hundred pounds of bulk is to be accommodated. But the gentleman of the church is not to be discouraged. He climbs onto the front seat, prys, good-naturedly, a young woman from her eight inches of space, jams himself in it by sheer force and takes the damsel on his knee.

As this manipulation has crowded the chauffeur into a state of total incapacity, the predicament is again amicably solved by another female accepting a perch upon a strange man's knee and the bus proceeds with the prayers of the church, presumably, upon it.

When we are within a few miles of Pnom-Penh the slavey of a bus finally goes on strike, quivers, hesitates, quivers again and stops in the middle of the road. The chauffeur gets out, does the usual poking about, mends something at the back with a piece of wire but instead of resuming his seat announces that we are out of petrol!

The passengers accept this gross carelessness with the patience of the East. Ten minutes drag by. Then the owner of a bicycle pulls it off the running board and announces he will send someone with essence if he passes a supply station. Two more bicyclists follow this lead. Gradually the passengers melt away. Some walk, others get a lift on top of a truck loaded with merchandise, until the vehicle is but normally full.

Sturdza helps me down to stretch cramped muscles. We sit on the grass under a tree by the roadside. The talk takes an intimate turn as my companion nibbles something. Probably a bit of dross but I do not appear to notice. I am no longer guardian of his opium habits. He

## POISON ARROWS

continues speaking of the people at the north of us, the Laotians.

"The black-bellied men of Laos tattoo the middle part of the body as an allure to the women, a sign of virility. The strip of loin cloth they wear over it is called a patois. Tattooing is a very old practice. It was known in Laos as early as one hundred and thirty B.C."

"In Borneo," I riposte, "it is the other way. The women tattoo themselves to attract lovers."

"Ah, Madame, we do not need the tattoo!" a pause and a sigh. "But I am unlucky! Mine has been an unhappy life. You are like Mummy. You understand. Not like my wife. That was very sad."

A fragile breeze ripples the leaves overhead, a subtle sound that lisps and trembles around us in the swooning Asian mid-day and mates our softened mood.

"Tell me—if you want to," I say quietly.

"My wife—I was very happy with her. We had two darling children, a nice home, two servants, pleasant friends. Then she had a haemorrhage, a miscarriage, which nearly took her life. When she recovered she was very anaemic. The doctor advised a change of scene.

"I rented a nice house at the seashore and went down from Saigon week-ends. My wife used to meet me at the station. I had a smart English dog cart and high stepper. Used to be very fond of horses. She would turn over the reins to me and tell me how the boys were and the happenings of the week, who won at tennis, the gossip of the little casino nearby. . . ." My guide has disappeared: Baron György Antalffy-Sturdza continues in a cold repressed voice:

"After a time Madame la baronne allowed the atten-

## PNOM-PENH

tions of a French capitaine. I remonstrated in a general way not thinking the matter serious. She was a very pretty woman and I was away all week. Then I began to notice that my friends were acting queerly. They declined my invitations to the weekly dinner party I was in the habit of giving. Finally a friend told me they were afraid I would find out what was going on and might shoot one or both and perhaps others might also get hurt. The Hungarian blood is impetuous, and my father's people avenge their honour.

"Then, one night at eleven o'clock I came back from a Chinese dinner at Cholon. These dinners usually kept on all night. I found my wife out of the house although she had declined to go, feeling tired. There was no servant, no one with the boys. One was nine but the other only three.

"I took a knife and went to the police—I had previously seen them, out driving, Madame la baronne with this capitaine and nearly fired on both, but had waited for proof. The Commissaire was in bed. 'Get up,' I said. 'Why?' he demands. 'I want a witness for my wife's flagrant infidelity.'

"The Commissaire eventually signed a paper instead of going which stated that I was not to be held responsible. Then I went to the house of this capitaine. I—I saw him through the window—naked—dancing before my wife who was in bed.

"I walked in. I said: 'Arm yourself.' He grabbed a revolver. Before he could use it I ran him through and pinned him to the wall. Then I grabbed a horse-whip and whipped my wife. She took it without flinching, not a murmur. Then I left the house.

## POISON ARROWS

"Everything went wrong after that. I was arrested of course. But the man recovered and the case was dismissed. My wife divorced me. I did not contest it and let her have the boys. Then came the accident that changed my whole life."

He stopped abruptly. But I knew what he meant—the grinding, smashing motor accident, the weeks of pain, the morphia and more morphia. Then to taper off, the opium, a tyrant from which he may now never escape.

A motor-cycle belonging to the bus company appears at this moment. It bears the familiar five gallon container of S.O. We are rescued and limp into Phnom-Penh about one o'clock having accomplished not more than twenty miles an hour average on a very good road! I thankfully transfer to a taxi and find comfortable room, private bath and good *dîner* in the excellent Hotel Royal run by the French.

Baron Sturdza excuses himself until the late afternoon when we plan a sight-seeing and shopping trip. He states he prefers to put up at a Chinese hotel in the centre of town in order to be with Em. At my request he agrees to bring Em.

When they arrive Em appears to be a quiet, unassuming youth of gentle manners. His costume, the usual white linen suit of the colonial is unobtrusive, his French adequate. He answers questions politely, volunteers nothing. I get nowhere with him during a two-hour period of 'look-see'.

The predominant impression of Cambodian architecture is its needle-pointed finials. Every pinnacle large and small goes into a richly carved cone which sends a straight dart towards heaven. The temples and pagodas are

## POISON ARROWS

invitation to join her in this far capital of Laos. A prospect pregnant with charm opens before me. Unfortunately it will take at least two months delay to realize it and a cremation ceremony in Bali has already wooed and won me for next month. Like one of Baudelaire's true travellers I decide to say: "*Toujours, Allons.*"

After the public bus experience, finding my democratic spirit at low ebb, I engage a motor for a week's trip at Angkor ending at Aranya-Pradesa, the Siamese border where a comfortable train conveys one to Bangkok.

Incidentally, as every traveller is perforce interested in expense, if only to be sure there is enough in the flour barrel to carry him on, I find a jotting in my notebook that this trip's expenses average sixty dollars gold a day whereas the trip into Moï-land with elephants and servants cost twenty-two dollars gold a day. The motor is cheaper at that: it will transport one in comfort two hundred miles a day to the elephant's tortuous twenty.

Sturdza is all guide the next morning as we set out for that mysterious ruined city, the focus of Indo Chinese travel. As we are leaving one of the avenues of large trees with which the French have beautified Pnom-Penh, my guide remarks:

"There are sixteen French functionaires out here to one in India, but they have cleaned up things and improved the city."

From the miscellany of information that flowed over me that day my notebook retains a few bits.

"On the left is Oudong, the ancient capital of Cambodia," continues Sturdza in his best guide book manner. "Those trees on the right are a kapoc planta-





## PNOM-PENH

tion. It is a kind of cotton-water-proof and compressible and light. The best Cambodian cotton is called *hirsutis cambodiensis*. It has a longer staple than the Indian cotton. There is a redwood tree in these parts called yan, or yang. It pours out oil and when cut and burnt makes cheap varnish. You will see the marabou storks here too, and the egret."

"At New Year in this country the eldest son always goes home. He is called Ahn-bay, elder brother. The first day he will kneel before his parents, ask their forgiveness for the year and the coming year and promise to put up a tablet to his father when dead and take care of the family. Then the younger brothers, Em-bay, kneel before their Ahn-bay and promise obedience. There is a very close family relation. The head wife among the Annamites, called vo-chanh, has an honourable position. The Memorial of Rights, the Ly-Hi, lays down the rule 'the *gia le ra*', which means the wife is equal. Much respect is paid to her.

"At Chinese New Years the Annamites often follow the Chinese custom of giving the Kitchen god a holiday. He goes to heaven to give an account of the family, while the ancestral spirits come down from heaven, so the path must be made safe from the evil spirits, the Makouis, who cannot stand noise. Hence the fire crackers and other violent explosions to drive them off. And red, the colour of happiness, is everywhere. Thousands of piastres are spent on celebrating New Years.

"The Annamites," Sturdza adds, "have a funeral custom for mourners. They wear the hair untied, a hempen rope across the forehead. And they do not get so drunk as the Cambodians either. In Cambodia," he

## POISON ARROWS

continues, "nearly every sugar palm tree has a bamboo ladder against it for a boy to climb so he can reach the bamboo tube that has been placed below an incision to catch the palm water. This is collected into huge cakes of sugar and sold in the market place or else allowed to ferment into the palm wine. Cambodians used to be fighters. Now they are drinkers and quarrelsome." Always I note a bias for the Annamites in Sturdza. "We were painting ourselves blue and wearing skins when the Annamites were an old civilized nation. The present Nguyen dynasty is nine hundred years old. The king lives in Hué. But," he admitted, "the Annamites love to gamble. At the opium houses much money goes in roulette and ba-guam, one of their favourite games of chance."

"Sturdza," I ask, venturing upon a delicate subject, "about how many pipes does a smoker take a day, usually?"

"One can smoke ten pipes three times a day and keep going nicely. After the twenty-fifth to thirtieth pipe one will be very deep in the land of dreams. He may not know how many he takes. I am very moderate. I limit myself to ten a day, unless some friend comes in and lying on my teakwood couch, our heads on porcelain pillows with my servant preparing the pipes, I may take one or two more. One rather loses count. When I was with Madame on the Moï trip I cut it down to two or three twice a day until I broke the lamp and had to eat dross."

We negotiate another bac at Kompong Luong, a genteel performance compared with our plebeian activities of yesterday. The helper to our chauffeur is a bare-

## CHAPTER XV

### ANGKOR—PIPE DREAMS PAST AND PRESENT

**A**NGKOR at last! The trail end of a lure that has led me half around the world, has teased my imagination since first photographers gave us the enigmatic faces of the Bayon, colossal, innumerable, smiling remotely amid writhing masses of smothering jungle.

Sturdza and I have been sightseeing ruins all day. Now as we stand before the Bayon he tells me it is part of the Royal City of Angkor Thom further north than Angkor Wat and built three hundred years before it.

The pyramidal religious structure known as Phimeanakas, which we visited coming to the Bayon, stirs the imagination as does the wealth of decoration in magnificent reliefs still to be seen on the east terrace. Both form part of the vanished glory of Angkor Thom. According to the Frenchman, Aymonier, the Khmer king, Jayavarman III began building Angkor Thom in the year of our Lord eight hundred and sixty and completed the mighty task in about forty years. We cannot see much of his Royal Palace, little of it remains, but the Temple of Bayon has withstood the devastating clutch of the jungle. As I look at its square enclosure I note that it is formed by galleries and colonnades, in the centre of which rises a tower square at the base and surrounded by its regiment of lesser towers conceived, it seems to me, by no normal

## ANGKOR

mind. Two hundred and fifty great stone faces are leering into the gathering shadows.

Later in the afternoon I wander away from Sturdza. The light is failing. Alone in the deepening shadows I penetrate further among these huge stone faces of Bayon. Two towers rise beside me. Each wall is formed into one vast human face thrusting out at me. A sardonic smile curves the lips, flares the nostrils, slants the eyes. As I stand between two of these demon masks they press closer and closer on either side as though to crush the small creature between them. More and more they seem to thrust towards the midget who has dared to intrude upon their elemental eternality. Now as I look at them in the approaching dusk, I feel that they are looking at me with oblique, cynical expression not human, not divine. Gigantic faces of Lokeçvaka, to me expressing no attribute of Buddha. Denizens of another world, that of the senses personified, creatures of a fevered imagination—they seem to press in upon me, mockingly.

An uncomfortable feeling assails me. Is it fear? Is it the presence of a jungle night drawing around me the forces of subtle tropical life? The owls' rhythmic calls, the bats' squeak as they weave erratic aerial patterns, the infinite concert of noise-making insects, the slithering of snakes, the faint cries of beasts of prey, causing a nocturne exciting, uncanny in these inexhaustible greeneries? It is eerie, unreal.

I am very glad to see Sturdza in a lower court and call to him. Those huge faces are still leering uncertain outlines too close on either side of me. They seem actually to move towards me in the greying light, closer, crushing, invincible. I tell Sturdza of my hallucination.

## POISON ARROWS

"Of course. They *are* pipe-dreams. Those old Johnnies, the Khmers, all hit the pipe. This whole conception belongs to the world of dreams. I've often felt like that face. Look! It smiles, is happy, doesn't care—lucky devils."

"Oh! And the Bayaderes and dancing Devas—those impossible Apsaras, are they all pipe dreams too?"

"*All of Angkor is a pipe dream.* Do you not see, Madame? Take the Wat. It is not simple like the beautiful lines of Thebes or Baalbeck. Although one perceives a perfect symmetry above and below. Monsters guard all the perrons of the entrances, the divine Apsaras, strangely smiling, scantily clothed, dance and twist in impossible postures in recurring groups; tiers of different levels, carvings everywhere in what appears to be confusion, wild disorder in this hill of chiselled stones."

He stops speaking, lost in his thoughts.

What fantasy! Yet those faces, leering at me, crowding me, diabolically smiling, colossal, overpowering, engulfing me in a world of insecurity and insanity! I feel alien emotions, teasing delights, veiled in shadowy fears that lure further along an intangible road to a land of opal shades of golden mist and faint harp music; peopled with self-sufficient, uncaring people, human and yet not human, strangely smiling, terrifying yet alluring—

A bat skims over my hat.

"Madame," exclaims Sturdza, rousing from his reverie, "we must go back to the motor. It is getting too dark to see the snakes."

Gladly I comply. If that is the dreamer's world let the dream pictures stay in the Bayon and haunt the living no more.

## ANGKOR

But the normal world does not entirely return. All of Angkor seems haunted by memories so potent that they come through the curtain of the past and actuate themselves in the present—that jewel temple Néak Pean sitting on a lotos in the middle of its own lake where only wraiths of devotees can reach it—those gloomy corridors of sinister trees at Ta Prom leaden with mysteries and evil things that lie in wait along their tomb-like shade, a sylphic crowd of beings not meant for humans to contact! Those garlanded naked figures dancing, abandoned, yet sexless, in postures impossible for bones and joints. Every inscrutable smile of these imponderable god-dancers is a curtain concealing unmentionable delights. Coleridge and Poe and Heine and Verlaine and other morbid writers have made strange complexes live for us in their printed words. The Khmers have left them in stone!

Angkor is north of the Great Lake (Tonle-sap) and the Wat or temple rears its marvels on the right bank of the river Siem-Reap which is a tributary—nine centuries old it was buried, forgotten, for half of that time.

In the glaring light of morning Sturdza's conception of Angkor still seems intriguing as I study the sculptured hill, formed into a square pyramid of three tiers. Yes, there is symmetry—like a bride's cake. Its outer perimeter measures six thousand and sixty yards. The base of the first storey is nearly three-quarters of a mile around, tireless green growth cracking the walls of sandstone and of limonite—huge stones fitted together without cement, at what cost of sweating slaves—rank growth slowly swallowing the temple, its carven animals, men and gods in ceaseless fecundity. At the top on the

## POISON ARROWS

third level I come to the most sacred place where broods a Buddha; little square rooms called Libraries are at the corners. I climb steep steps, rough and broken, past the Apsaras forever contorting, wreathed in smiles of discreet mockery, eyes half closed; past crouching lions and sacred serpents, their seven-hooded heads spread out like a fan.

A tropical storm is gathering. I climb the steep rocky layers in haste so as to find shelter before the threatened downpour commences. The oppressive air is overpowering, shimmering waves of heat rise from the plain below. The sky, now a black canopy of gloom, adds its sinister note to the ghoulish feeling of unreality—these pipe-dream faces of dancing maidens and menacing beasts and serpents—these sculptured counterparts lose their rigidity and seem to be endowed with life, cruel survivals of other worlds. A chant of the bonzes making their rhythmic monotony at the base of the temple, mingles with these challenging shapes.

A hard climb to the second tier, shows still more stairways. As I mount, still more eerie feelings assail.

I stop at last for rest in the West upper terrace, sit in a doorway with no corridor beyond. Instead a sheer drop of ninety feet to the terrace below. I look out upon the plain and beyond at the forest stretching inscrutably into the black sky. It is an alien menacing world.

With relief I hear footsteps and welcome a return to the normal.

Sturdza suddenly joins me. He asked the time a half hour ago and disappeared. Now he states that he went to meet Em! I swallow surprise. It seems he thought that this would be a capital time to have Em see Angkor;

## ANGKOR

has not been able to afford it before. The youth had got 'a lift' with friends and would be no trouble and would stay only a day or two. The subterranean ways of these people. Like India, they are past deciphering by an Occidental.

Seating himself beside me on the stone sill of a non-existent doorway in the Wat's tower, our feet almost on the edge of a yawning chasm of sculptured ruins, Sturdza's talk travels from Em to his last client, an American woman. He gives her name and residence and pertinent description of herself and her background. Then out of the casual chatter snakes up the head of something unpleasant:

"Mrs. A. is an ardent Protestant. She tried hard to convert me. She tried every way. I believe she was even ready to try the bedroom way."

"What—what did you say, Sturdza?"

A slight smile and a tiny shrug. "*La route du lit.* I think she liked me very much. But I pretended not to see. I—"

"Baron Sturdza! What a hideous thing to say. If you must say such things, say them in French. English ears are untrained to such crudity. But you simply must not talk about American women that way. You do not understand. Just because she was friendly there is no need to say such a disgusting thing about a charming woman. Whether it is true or not it should not be said." Indignation, coloured by the question of what he might be saying about me the following year, continues the theme.

"Undoubtedly you misunderstood the lady. She liked you. Perhaps she was sorry for you." (That is a

## POISON ARROWS

mean dig.) "But an American woman is not forever hunting for men to be intimate with. She may squeeze your hand, put an arm around your neck in the dance or even kiss you. But it may not mean a thing. It depends somewhat upon the social set in which she has been brought up. With us, boys and girls mingle freely, in sports, business, social—all kinds of activities. There is a lot of free and easy comradeship at times; but it does not go beyond a certain point any oftener than with the much-chaperoned Europeans. Perhaps not so often. Girls are perfectly aware of 'the facts of life' and know when the situation is getting out of hand. Personal virtue is prized with us as much as with you. It is not given lightly. That was a horrid thing for you to say—a nasty European man's idea. Not the speech of Mummy's gentleman."

Sturdza took this flaying contritely:

"I am sorry. It just slipped out. It is difficult for the European to understand the American woman. I will not say it again."

So peace is restored. We are back on the old note of guide, plus repressed emotion. Sturdza unfolds some details of the marvellous sculptures lavished on Angkor.

"In Angkor Wat you see portrayed upon that large panel the amusingly uncomfortable predicament of the creatures who are being churned in the Sea of Milk and this legend is carved on gateways of Angkor Thom. Also that impressive entrance to the town is bordered by a magnificent balustrade of grinning demons with crested heads, fifty-four of them, matched by the same number of dignified demi-gods in queer peaked hats, the Moukouta. Each row bears aloft the giant body of the serpent god,

## ANGKOR

Vasouki, its finials unexpectedly bursting out into the many-headed cobra fan of Hindu mythology.

"As you will note, Madame, this myth supplies innumerable motifs for the Angkor sculptures, the Devas and Assouras (demi-gods and demons) the Apsaras and Devatas, flower-decked sylphs and nymphs enigmatically smiling, human in shape but not human in posture nor expression—drugged dreams fixed into stone. It can be nothing else. Opium must have been the inspiration of the Khmer sculptors.

"Buried at the bottom of the Sea of Milk, so runs the myth, was the amrita, the food of immortality contained in a small bottle which could only be got by churning. The mountain of the World borne by the tortoise, Vishnu, is in the middle of this ocean. The Devas and the Assouras decided to bring up the amrita, if possible. They used the great serpent Vasouki—after twining it around the world mountain, as a rope to churn the sea. Its tail was held by the Devas and its head by the Assouras and for a thousand years they churned and churned, pulling first one end, then the other, in the Sea of Milk. First appeared Apsara, then Lakshmi, the Goddess of Beauty, then strange denizens of the deep and at last came the long-sought-for amrita; Vishnu took not only the Goddess of Beauty for his wife, but before the demons and demi-gods could claim the reward for their efforts, possessed himself of the food for immortality. What do you think that was, Madame? Opium, of course, that makes gods of men—while it lasts."

Returning to the Bungalow, we pass gangs of prisoners in leg irons working with armed guards. They are repairing the road and erecting over it arches gay with

## POISON ARROWS

flags and flowers. The King of Cambodia is scheduled to pay a visit to-morrow night. It is to be a gala affair and special Cambodian dancers are coming for a moonlight performance on the vast causeway that leads from the west to Angkor Wat. Prisoners in chains from the penal colony of Polo Condor, naked save for ragged cotton trousers, are toiling in the sweltering sun creating the pomp of royalty in which they have no share! Those outside and those inside the picket fence of privilege. For how many thousands of years has this been a recurrent picture in this land!

Sturdza remarks: "The Government gives the King of Cambodia sixty thousand piastres a month to keep up a certain show, but he cuts a sorry picture compared with the vanished splendours of this place. The dances revive it best. I have arranged for a special performance to-night for Madame. There is a Dutch Commission of Archæologists also leaving to-morrow, who will share the expense. Madame is fortunate that it is full moon and that the special troupe of King's dancers are here. It will be a good performance. Have you heard the story of how Angkor was discovered?"

"Was it the naturalist, Moyhat?"

"Yes, Madame, he was looking for a certain plant. An old native told him that it could be found in the jungle where there were ruins of big cities. No, he would not show where it was. It was cursed by the gods. But Moyhat kept on exploring until he finally got to this great temple at Angkor. Then later a group of archæologists saw wonders that the botanist had not seen—a delirium of stones set without mortar—a plan of the gods. They decided that eight centuries had passed

PRISONERS IN CHAINS—ERECTING GATE ARCHES  
CHIENG MUALITY



## ANGKOR

since it had been inhabited. Then it was remembered that not long before Angkor was discovered a little old book written by a Chinese philosopher and traveller, Tcheu-Ta-Kouan, had come to light. The writer claimed to have been sent as Ambassador from China in twelve hundred and ninety-five and that the Bayon had a tower of gold, built in the ninth century, four hundred years before the Wat. He described a life of such gorgeousness that the book was tossed aside as imaginative fancies. Now it is the only record, reading like a fairy tale, that gives us details of that opulent civilization, at one time numbering thirteen millions. "Of course many of them were slaves and prisoners of war, who slaved and suffered while making these marvels."

About ten o'clock, mellowed by an excellent dinner, we walk a few hundred yards to the great causeway that leads to the Wat of Angkor. An unforgettable scene is staged here. Twenty-one dancers, gorgeous in new costumes for the king's visit, gold and velvet, reds, blues and browns, and silk sampots, are swinging in the fan dance. Sixty-eight torches of bamboo filled with resin from the yao (got from burning a hole in the big tree trunk) make orange spots in the strong moonlight. Incense is drifting around us. Strange music, monotonous with a melodic rhythm, almost syncopated, rolls from simple instruments, a xylophone, flute, a loose-headed drum and a semi-circle of cymbals.

There is a Flower Ballet, and a Dance of the Giants, like nothing I have seen before, odd little twisting figures expressing emotions in alien, conventional patterns.

Then comes an Episode in the Legend of Chey-Teât.

## POISON ARROWS

The gold and jewel-studded figures of the King and Princess wearing the Mukketa, a spire-crowned head-dress, kneel and salute us before the dance. Their supple fingers raised above the forehead, curved outward, like bird wings. Dancing barefoot, arms and fingers dislocating and weaving a tortuous tapestry in the cool light, the company enact the following drama which is quoted verbatim from the quaint little prepared programme:

“King Chey-Teât is hunting, with his wife queen “Vorac-Chanand and his retinue. The chase is in full “swing when Kanteân, the Giants’ king, appears, who “wild with lust of the beautiful princess waits for a “chance to carry her off. He does not have to wait “long because distracted by the plucking of pretty “flowers, which she loves passionately, she wanders “away from her husband. And she has no thought that “every step separating her from him brings disaster “nearer and nearer. To her great terror, she suddenly “sees the king of the giants start out upon her, who “indifferent to her cries of grief and fear makes off “with her through the air to his dwelling.

“Chey-Teât masters himself after the first paroxysm “of despair, and flies into a great rage. At once he “raises an army, to go and battle in his retreat with the “ravisher of his wife. After the bloody overthrow of “Kanteân who was in flight he takes back his darling “home.”

Beyond the causeway and the moat where I know a thousand lotos are sleeping, a female monkey is perched

## ANGKOR

in an oil tree, baby hanging to her stomach. She is busily consuming lichi nuts, grimacing and chattering as though she too enjoyed the weird scene. Are those parakeets I hear in the forest calling to the moon? A small group of villagers, chewing betel, and some naked boys, are of the Eastern scene.

We walk back to the Bungalow amid the muted cadence of a tropic night, white in the moon brilliance, deep violet shadows under the sleeping trees. The charm of frog music joins the rhythmic rasping of the cicadas, accented by calls from birds of the night tracing here and there a fleeting line athwart the Southern Cross.

Romance is abroad. The ardent urge of nature towards lavish growth and luscious flowering grips the imagination, already stirred by the unreal beauty of the King's dancers enacting the drama of gods and love under the clear radiance of moon magic.

In silence we loiter, prolong the walk. Contrary to custom Sturdza accompanies me to an open court, one of the many, upon which my little suite opens. A tile-floored, covered gallery connects it with others of its kind. Stepping from the white moonlight we stand within the deep shadow of this corridor. Still no word has been spoken. The impulse of the Asian night is strong. Hovers on heavy wings in the purple shadow; drifts insidious fragrance from flowering trees.

Facing each other our hands come together. Ten finger tips touch ten finger tips. Pressing—pressing—in tense contact. Subtle electric currents pass through them, thrilling, exquisite, compelling.

A long pulsing silence, then, breathed softly:  
“Grace!”

## POISON ARROWS

"George." He quivered. Only at Dak Lak have I risked the intimacy of his Christian name.

"I want to kiss you," excited, whispered.

"Perhaps—if you will take it as a kiss—with no future."

"No," intensely. "You must understand. You cannot play with Europeans. It is nothing—or all."

"Then— Good night—and sleep well."

He covers the hand extended. Presses one fervent kiss upon it. Straightens into a military salute; turns to leave.

The moon, the warm madness of the moon, floods down upon him.

He slips back into the deep darkness of the portico where I am still standing struggling between romance and common sense.

"Must it be good night? It would be so easy, so safe from intrusion. No one need know—and so beautiful! Wouldn't it?"

My response hesitates. Why not snatch a flower when it beckons? A strange exotic flower; something different. Passion flowers. Mountain peaks. The old urge for experimentation lures.

Suddenly I lose the Occidental objective view of the East, cease to be the observer, the alien surveying the Orient as a background for his Western reaction; lose that sense of 'racial superiority', however well or ill deserved; I am assailed by a desire to toss intellectual conceptions to the tropic night and melt into the feel of the East, to be one with its sensuous body, its bare feet padding the soft earth, its flexing muscles made for amorous play, flowers in the hair, naked bodies caressed by vivid coloured sunsets and hot languorous dawns.

## ANGKOR

After years of Oriental travel to-night I feel Asia lift its curtain at the moonlit ruins of Angkor. I want to cast off so-called civilization, let conventions go to the soft winds. The East is wooing me like a lover, ardent yet subtle, beckoning deeper and deeper into the violet shadows. A dangerous mood—is this the way Sturdza feels—is this what has charmed him and the occasional European exile one meets in outposts—that young Frenchman, blood brother to the Pnongs, in the Moï jungle? The sentient, unhurrying, unashamed body of the East, silently, carelessly wrapping its warm arms around my spirit, unheeding, indifferent to the fabric of science, psychology, all the *isms* of written civilization. It snares the primitive senses and beckons to its bed of hard teakwood or woven bamboo or leaf-strewn earth—it invites me, without lust to the rich secret of life, the incense of nature's beauty without evasion and hypocrisy which are the chains of civilization. Drink it if I have the courage—the dark spreading grip of the jungle might not let me go!

Sensing this hesitation, the sensitive soul of the man shrinks a little. He too values romance more than passion.

“And yet,” I murmur, steadyng ever towards the ideal.

“And yet,” he echoes softly.

“Good night, Sir Galahad.”

“Good night. It is better so. *Un rêve ravissant—et pur.*” He bows low. Is gone.

—a dream, ravishing and pure—a pipe dream.

It is our last night at Angkor.

## CHAPTER XVI

ARANYA-PRADESA—FAREWELL INDO CHINA

THE next morning for the early start to Aranya-Pradesa, Sturdza is late as usual. Even though I sent my room boy to call him, he probably has drowsed off again after his 4 a.m. pipe. Having no watch he is not sure whether the boy called him or whether he dreamed it. On the borderland of his opium world, it is hard to know the thing from its picture.

He appears nearly an hour later, smiling, courteous as always, goes without his breakfast and superintends the packing of our luggage into the motor. He settles a difference of opinion concerning an obvious overcharge in the bill by counselling me to pay it. His easy philosophy dictates the line of least resistance. His dignity will not permit him to haggle over money; wherein may lie the answer to his having so little of it.

So we depart exchanging false smiles and goodwill salutations. Although the distance to be travelled is not more than one hundred and fifty kilometres the road so far as Sisophon is bad, mostly unpaved, dusty and rutty.

A silence, unusual for Sturdza at this hour of the day, engulfs us.

“A penny for them, Sturdza.”

“This is our last day together. To-morrow you move to new scenes and I—I go back to a dreary existence.

## ARANYA-PRADESA

Last night—it was beautiful—a perfume of dreams. You know the Spanish proverb: ‘The wings of something beautiful have hovered near.’ I have no regret. I can always live it again in the early morning reverie.” He takes from his pocket a worn wallet. From it extracts a small packet in which are two unset stones, a kind of topaz. He holds them out to me. “Will you choose one? I would like to give you something. I got them at Battambang last year in a mine near there. They are not very saleable—or I fear they would have gone long ago. But they are beautiful, such yellow fire. I love them. Often I take them out just to look at them.”

“Yes, Baron Sturdza, if you will take this bit of yellow to put in its place. It is a twenty dollar gold piece and the gorgeous eagle on it was designed by one of our great sculptors, St. Gaudens. It has been in my pocket-book for years. I love to carry gold. It has a high vibration.”

“I will keep it always. It shall not be spent.”

With other foolish remarks, we exchange the pocket-pieces and revert to our business of being travellers.

“Soon, Madame, we should be getting to Poipet, the border of Siam, and less than two miles further is Aranya-Pradesa where your train starts to-morrow morning for Bangkok. We shall put up at the Bungalow there. I was there before and know the proprietors, a big Swede and his wife. She is French Colonial and a very nice woman. Has an awful time with the man. He drinks a lot and the stuff makes him crazy. There was a bad row last time, a big to-do. He was running amuck with a carving knife. Fortunately, there was a party of doctors at the Bungalow going to some medical meeting in Bangkok. It took four of them to get him down and another gave him a shot of

## POISON ARROWS

morphine, so we had peace. The woman was very sweet. She fixed several pipes for me." A pause while Sturdza seems to be remembering something rather pleasant. He continues:

"The next morning when he came out of it and began roaring around, a doctor gave him a big glass full of whisky and that on an empty stomach put him out again and the doctor's party and my clients got off comfortably."

At the frontier, while my belongings are being inspected, Sturdza utters an exclamation and dashes after a good-looking, sad-faced woman in bedraggled white silk frock, with no sleeves and short skirt. An animated conversation ensues while I watch with impatience the little drama. Sturdza is urging something eagerly, persuasively. The woman is rejecting his proposition with tired volubility. At last she appears to yield and Sturdza returns announcing triumphantly:

"It is all right. She will go back. Madame Bornstrom, who runs the Bungalow. Her husband is on another of his jags and she was leaving him. Afraid for her life. I have promised to protect her. She must go back. There is no other place for Madame to stay to-night."

"A cheery, restful place, Sturdza! Can we give the lady a seat?"

"No. She has a conveyance and will come along as soon as she gets some dope at the apothecaire. We will wait and follow her. There goes the party of that Dutch Commission we saw at Angkor. They are lucky too that she is going back."

While loitering we motor along the main street of the town, progressing very slowly over the unpaved road

## ARANYA-PRADESA

avoiding a litter of cans and pigs and refuse. The wooden buildings elevated on stilts are frequently connected by a wide veranda where much of the business is transacted in front of sorry little open-faced shops. There is a general merchandise store and beyond, a row of dilapidated houses with a dance hall. It is the 'red light' district. A forlorn, hopeless little town.

Perhaps sobered by the defection of his wife, or by her subsequent ministrations from Poipet, M. Bornstrom remains out of sight and sound in the back parts of his small hostelry while a gay party of travellers consume excellent food and drink until about midnight.

Baron Sturdza is unusually brilliant. He is stimulated by good wine and by a conversationalist worthy of him in the person of Mynheer, Head of the Dutch party of Archæologists. The talk touches upon Borabadur, that exquisite temple ruin in Java; its similarities to and differences from the Angkor architecture; also the overwhelmingly ornate carvings derived from the Hindu and Dravidian traditions that stun the tourist when first seeing the Balinese temples. It is very interesting as my thought is already projected towards these countries. Sturdza displays a special knowledge that is surprising. Perhaps there is also a desire to appear on our last night in a role more suited to his past dignities. Whatever the cause, his anecdotes and repartee show unusual attainments. His swan song for me. The pity of it that he must collapse like a pricked balloon.

The Dutch Commission crowds the limited accommodation of this flimsily built wooden structure. Madame has but one bedroom to offer and suggests that Sturdza and I share it. When this obviously convenient

## POISON ARROWS

arrangement is declined, Madame amiably agrees to letting Sturdza occupy a wooden bench in the kitchen wing from which her own bedroom opens. The said bedroom being at the time sacrosanct to the drunken husband, well locked in.

At 3 a.m. the whole household is aroused from exhausted sleep by a pounding and kicking and subsequent shattering of wooden panels. It is M. Bornstrom, the lion aroused and ready for further battle. He is telling that part of Indo China his suspicions that his wife is not behaving as she should with one, *sale bête, fils de chien*, and other even more unmentionable epithets. Just then came a crashing of glass from Sturdza's pipe outfit as it lands on the big Swede's head and smashes to the floor. In the safe distance of a long corridor, I see Madame hurling several plates at the same objective in the effort to stop the progress of her murderous husband. Several Dutchmen in pyjamas and nightshirts reach the avenging one as he is taking a weapon from the wall, his actions being impeded by the great unsteadiness of his legs.

The alibi indicates that Sturdza was enjoying his early pipe upon his kitchen bench and the amiable Madame was keeping vigil with him having nowhere else to go. Finally with two husky men sitting on his prostrate form, the crazy one appears to accept this explanation, is pacified and helped back to his room for further recuperation while Sturdza valiantly agrees to mount guard.

At nine-thirty that morning the Siamese train moves out of little Aranya-Pradesa. Sturdza has put me on the train as a good guide should. Assisted by my chauffeur and helper, who are to take him back to Pnom-Penh,

## ARANYA-PRADESA

and where no doubt Em awaits, he attends to the comfortable disposition of my luggage. We part with a handclasp. He bends over my hand with a courtly kiss, European fashion. We say very little. The bills are paid. All arrangements completed.

"I shall always remember—every night in my dreams——"

"Good-bye, Sturdza."

"Good-bye, Madame."

The last I see of Indo China as the train rounds a bend and the Bungalow comes in sight for a moment, is Sturdza on the back veranda waving good-bye. Behind him something white flutters. It is the dress of the amiable Madame.

## CHAPTER XVII

### BANGKOK—SIGHT-SEEING REEL

BANGKOK! A rich sequence of places and people unfolds a new impression. It is many shades gayer, a wholly different quality from French dominated Cambodia and Annam on the East and British controlled Federated Malay States and Burma on the South and West. Why this is soon becomes clear. Those subject peoples are none too happy in their beaten bondage to a superior force. A force which is drastically accomplishing an overlay of Western civilization and too often going rotten itself with drink and drugs—Asia avenging her own. While Siam is an unconquered nation working out its own fate in its own way. For centuries, while she has lost territory, is now hemmed in by two of the most powerful modern nations, she is still struggling to preserve her individuality. Through all the dark subtleties, intrigues and cruelties of an Asian primitive civilization she has developed into a quasi-modern nation. She has in the last two generations reached out an eager hand for the world's science and mechanics and is even attempting some governmental house-cleaning according to the pattern of Europe. A king, His Majesty Prajadhipok, has resigned his unlimited sway over eleven million subjects. With his queen, Rambai Barni, he is living in exile, more or less self-imposed, upon an estate in

## BANGKOK

England. His young son, shorn of absolute powers, is submerged in a Regency, formed by a Supreme Council of State, a Cabinet Council and a Privy Council. Siam has modelled her Legislative programme according to the French or Continental system. The governmental set-up of various departments resembles that of other modern civilized states.

A contributing factor to the charm of Bangkok is the prevalence of English in the traveller's world. As this is the secondary language for most educated Siamese the exhausting business of receiving information through a half-familiar medium is removed. It is a relief after the months of polyglot languages through which I have been labouring.

But something is missing. A flatness of living spreads over this fascinating capital of almost a million inhabitants. Can it be that I am missing an erratic, even annoying companion, a colourful stream of storied information, a guide who was also a man, uncertain as the mathematical X, but always courteous, always alight with a strange fire that no longer flickers through my days!

Bangkok presents a fascinating picture of Arabian Nights' splendour, of oriental opulence, splash, colour and movement, enough surely to satisfy any traveller. It has been the same from time immemorial; now modernized by sanitation, paved streets, organized transportation (even the succulent but evil-smelling fruit, the durian, is regulated, and a charge made for it when carried on the tramways). Not only can the traveller enjoy the peculiar, the beautiful and unique sights of this gay clean city, but it can be done in hotel comfort with

## POISON ARROWS

the knowledge that, accident or illness befalling, there is the up-to-date Chulalongkorn Hospital and the Saovabha Institute which are prepared to deal with the dreaded tropical diseases, as well as small-pox, rabies, diphtheria and snakebites.

The very first day's itinerary includes an acquaintance with these admirable institutions. The Emerald Buddha is beckoning; up the river the Porcelain Temple awaits in all its fantasy of spires and china plates. But the claims of a sick friend come first. I stop at the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital. This was opened in nineteen hundred and fourteen 'to examine and treat all sufferers regardless of racial differences', and is operated by the Red Cross Society (Sabha Kajad Sayam).

My friend who is travelling around the world with her Doctor husband knows all about germs and infections, but just one moment of carelessness landed her here. A few days ago she was enjoying the wonders of Angkor. While waiting for the conveyance that was to take her to the Siamese border she ate a banana. During many weeks of travelling she never ate raw fruits except those she could peel herself. Now, busily chatting with a fellow traveller, she stripped the banana and threw the skin away; instead of holding the fruit by the skin she held it in her hand.

Before the Doctor's wife got to Bangkok she was feeling queer. But being a Doctor's wife she said nothing about it. Her husband was having a holiday. It was just some collywobbles. That night at the beautiful Phya Thai Hotel, formerly a royal palace, she felt very queer indeed, hot and cold, objects receded or else rushed at her through blurred vision. Pleading fatigue she sent her

## BANGKOK

husband off on a gay party. Very unpleasant symptoms developed rapidly and subsequent events ceased to be rational. She had snatches of memory; of ringing for the boy; of a charming helpful lady connected with the hotel, of her husband's return, of an ambulance and a procession of nightmares; of skilled medical attention and good nursing. She had infected herself, from her fingers to the banana, with the amoebic dysentery germ. How prevalent this is in the East is indicated from a single sentence in the hospital report: 'One may state with fair accuracy that nearly every Siamese has been affected at least once by amoebic dysentery'. The only reason that the Doctor's wife did not become a candidate for that heavenly group with wings and haloes (for she was a bad case) was the existence of this modern medical unit and her husband's promptness in rushing her to it. The need for keeping up one's morale is nowhere so apparent as in the tropics. That enervating climate calls for stimulant. One drinks too much alcohol, eats queer concoctions, sleeps too little. It is pleasant to think that if the python becomes too obstreperous there is an adequate refuge here for repairs.

Convalescing, all danger passed, my friend, being that kind of a wife, suggests that I take her husband under my wing.

"Doctor," she always calls him that, like a name, "has been having a thin time." No comment on the thinnest of thin times she has had. Her husband, relieved from his keen anxiety about her, reverts to his usual cynical humour:

"She has cheated Abraham out of a good girl. You remember when that sour old spinster, Sister Mary Ann,

## POISON ARROWS

died, the minister at the funeral said she had gone to Abraham's bosom? And old Brother Jonas whispered to his neighbour: 'That's all very well for Mary Ann, but rather tough on Abraham.'

Delighted to have a companion for the sight-seeing of the next few days, I rush him along to the Snake Park. After my dose of utterly alien atmosphere it is refreshing to have someone who speaks my language, not only in Americanese, but in point of view, frank, unsexy comradeship.

The Saovabha Institute is a Pasteur and medical centre. The Snake Park connected with it is a scientific home where those herptological menaces to human life are studied, their venom extracted and, after passing through the patient horse or cow, is made into anti-toxic sera. Fifteen years ago Siam followed Brazil's lead in establishing these snake pits sunk deep in the ground, covered with cement and dotted with queer little hollow mounds, like the Eskimo igloos.

The Director is waiting for us, having been apprised by a telephone call from the American Consul General, courteously supplies some data which shows that this little Far East Kingdom has indeed got on the scientific band-wagon.

In the past twenty-five years over three thousand cases of snakebites have been successfully treated at the Saovabha Institute. Over seven thousand patients were given the prophylactic inoculation of anti-rabic vaccine, while yearly is prepared small-pox vaccine for two million persons; four hundred thousand doses of anti-cholera vaccine and large quantities of anti-typhoid, plague, gonococcus vaccines; also anti-dysentery and other sera,

## BANGKOK

an impressive list considering all the laboratory research entailed in their manufacture.

As we stand safely watching the various death dealers leading their lives comfortably, I notice a banded krait (*Bungarus coeruleus*) one snick from which is enough; hardly gives one time for prayer. My first observation of it was in a jungle bungalow in India when one dropped from the cloth ceiling into the washbowl where I was about to plunge my hands. Beyond is the grass snake, colour of palms, not half an inch thick, hard to see and very poisonous. Next to it is a Russell's viper (*Vipera russelii*) five feet long and a very black hooded cobra. Not far off is a mamba (*Dendraspis angusticeps*) long, slender serpent from South Africa, loves trees. Its bite is almost certain death and like the king cobra it attacks without provocation.

In order to exhibit his pets, one attendant, with no protection but metalled leggings and a long iron prong now jumps into the pit where a specimen of the hamadryad is coiled sluggishly. Roused by the iron prod this particular king cobra darts in the air and ties itself into bow knots, a nine foot ribbon of death, until unexpectedly it projects almost an arc and strikes at the attendant. Escaping by barely an inch from the fatal fangs the man pins the reptile down into writhing coils and makes his escape, his taste for snake-play apparently fully satisfied.

Doctor, although impressed by the admirable scientific accomplishments of this independent Asian state, is definitely on vacation, refuses long to be serious about anything: an escape from too much sight-seeing, his wife being an indefatigable novelty seeker. He has been a

## POISON ARROWS

week in Bangkok and has not been near a temple. He now begins innocently; addressing the Honourable Director:

"I suppose you know Dr. Pereira's work on poisons at the Butantan Institute in Brazil since you have modelled this one after it. This exploring lady here has written about that poison factory in her book on South America. But there are a couple of snake stories she has not put in. Have you a water moccasin here? I'm. So that is what it looks like—an ugly customer. The last time I was in Detroit, I was called in consultation to a hospital. My confrère told me the story of a girl who went swimming somewhere in these parts. She saw some pretty white pebbles on the bottom in smooth sand. She grabbed a couple and started to swim ashore. The wind freshened and she had to work for it. So she put one of the pebbles in her mouth and let the other go. Somehow she swallowed it. As nothing happened, after a time she forgot it. But coming home on the steamer she began to have indigestion and by the time she landed it was pretty bad. She was rushed to this hospital and X-rays showed a live water moccasin sitting pretty in her stomach."

"How extraordinary," burst from the Director.

"You see," Doctor continues, enjoying this effect upon his audience, "that girl's pebble was an egg and it hatched and grew nearly two feet long. Poisons strong enough to kill it would probably kill the girl and the doctors were afraid to operate for fear that the serpent would become agitated and bite its host. I saw the girl. She did not know about her little friend, of course."

"What happened?" I exclaim impatiently.

Doctor shrugged his shoulders. "The doctors were still trying to decide when I left."

## BANGKOK

The gleam of interest in the Director's eye flickered out, but revived at the next question:

"Do you think that a python could swallow a person alive and not have him know it?" Pythons having been on my schedule in the Philippines along with bats and wild tribes I too am all attention.

"I certainly would like to know," Doctor continues genially. "In a book about some islands in the China sea or maybe it was more towards Australia, the writer tells of a native girl whose leg was swallowed by a python. It started on the foot and worked all the way up. She never woke up until the head got to her body and could go no further." Doctor stopped.

"And?" I exclaim breathlessly.

"Oh, that's all. Don't remember what happened. The point is—how well these natives sleep."

I decide that at another time and alone I shall visit the Red Cross Sukhumal Health Centre and see the Siamese children taking lessons in First Aid and personal hygiene; also the Leprosy control station at Phra Pradaeng. Much better to show Doctor a drink than more good works.

We go along to my hotel, The Oriental, for a tea-party on the terrace. This is built beside the Menam. This means river and is short for the Menam Chao Phya which divides the city and flows about thirty-five kilometres to the Gulf. A sand bar at its mouth stops all vessels of over twelve feet draught. They anchor at the island of Koh Si Chang, and the passengers are transferred in launches going up the Menam to Bangkok. They get a thrilling panorama of sea-scape jungles, plantations, orderly wharves and a skyline pierced by countless glittering spires of a city where the Kings of

## POISON ARROWS

Siam have ridden abroad on royal white elephants; have ruled despotically amid intrigues and wars; have murdered and been murdered in breathtaking splendour. Now electricity, aeroplanes, congresses of tropical medicine or science, colleges, Boy Scouts are added to the picture without interrupting the life that for centuries has pursued its gorgeous oriental pattern.

All is perfect on the terrace, smart chairs and tables, cool drinks, except for those dipterous insects of whining wings and vicious probosces hovering in clouds about us. We slap at them futilely. I am somewhat cheered by Doctor's comments that they are reportedly not of the Anopheles family. He becomes much diverted, as each of my tea guests arrives. We watch the casual encompassing of his or her legs in a cotton bag brought for the purpose, usually a sarong or sampot sewed up and provided with a drawstring. Conversation languishes until this protection from the assiduous mosquito is in place. Doctor finally succumbs to the custom and following my lead claps his hands to summon a boy to fetch a leg bag—"like a horse, only the wrong end."

He listens carefully to the complaints of an American who tinkles the ice in his 'tall one' as he pronounces anathema upon the Siamese dock authorities. They have forbidden the big round-the-world liner lying in the harbour to land or to take on passengers because it has touched at a port where the plague has appeared and is scheduled to stop at another port where yellow fever has broken out. My acquaintance has booked a passage on it for himself and wife and objects to being interfered with.

"But, man," exclaims Doctor, for once serious, "don't you know bubonic plague is one of the worst scourges of

## BANGKOK

the East? The rats and the lice on steamers carry it. Every up-to-date steamer to-day is scientifically rat-proofed but if it is tied up to the dock—even if it puts tin collars on the hawsers—a few of the vermin get on board and spread it. You ought to be thankful that you are in a country that has sense enough to take precautions. Suppose your wife got it!" A chilly silence is his reply. I throw a conversational plank over the thin ice. My dubiosity of Doctor as a social asset is increasing.

However, that night I take him to a Chinese restaurant; our host, the delightful American Consul General, has another guest, a Royal Prince of Siam. The young Prince is charming, speaks good Oxford English, keeps a racing stable. His slim length, muscled and graceful, is clad in the approved aristocratic garb of the moment; patent leather half shoes, glimpses of black silk hose, a sampot, which is like a sarong, of fine dark blue silk, and grey mohair coat. His hair is shiny black and smooth, his skin a rich tan.

He presents me with a lei of roses and needle flower and tuberoses. He calls it puang malai; says garlands are used for every ceremony; that there is quite a ritual in the flower giving. Marigolds and yellow flowers are used for the temples, also the lotos, called dok-bua. The name for rose is dok-kularp, for needle flower, dok-kem. He tells me that pah means cloth; a pah-ning for men goes between the legs; pah-sin is the woman's sarong and pah-hom is a breast cloth worn by unmarried girls.

The Prince replies to Doctor's question about the exchange.

"The Siamese coin is the tical, but it is now called the baht. It is divided into one hundred satangs. It used to

## POISON ARROWS

be worth forty-four and one-half cents gold, now about thirty-three cents—”

“Oh,” interrupts Doctor, “since the gold standard toppled off in nineteen hundred and thirty-two.”

The Prince nods briefly and finishes his sentence: “The Straits’ dollar was worth fifty-six cents and the French piastre thirty-nine cents; but nobody knows now from day to day what the exchange will be.”

We eat chicken with fried rice and ground peanuts; liver sausage; a very good fish, chalamet, considered a great delicacy; lotos flowers and almond paste and for dessert, sweetened birdsnest and a fruit the Prince calls lam yei.

He continues: “This Chinese quarter has about a hundred thousand. Perhaps you have noticed it is separated from the rest of the city. It is better. If there should be an uprising we can turn machine guns on them. Across the Menam is our old Bangkok, the quarter where the Siamese, about another hundred thousand, live on the canals. They have no roads; sampans are their only means of getting about. They work the sampans with long paddles something like the gondolas of Venice. You will see it to-morrow when you visit the klongs—the canals—and our water markets. Launches run up and down among the sampans like motor buses on a highway.

“Your countrymen came here as missionaries a century ago. They have established excellent schools and a hospital.” The Prince continues politely: “Our name for American missionaries is ‘Moh’, the word for physician, because when they first came they helped the sick people.” In spite of his patent leather pumps and tailored coat, it

## BANGKOK

is evident that missionaries and all their works are not for him. Buddhism is embedded in his germ plasms. His soul is of the East, steeped in pride of an ancient race.

I ask about the status of the women. The Prince replies: "The upper class Siamese girl is much secluded but fairly well educated—reads and writes English. But many girls cannot marry because there are not enough young men of her station in life. The Mungchaos (royal) princesses are out of luck. My sisters have no opportunity of meeting young men. The princes mix among people and meet girls. And sometimes one of them can marry a commoner, if the King permits. A princess does not have to put up with secondary wives, if the King chooses to so decree. The King has been absolute monarch. But now all that is changing."

He told of another interesting phase of Siamese life now disappearing, that of the saked. This man used to be a kind of slave, but he had to be a pure-blooded native. He served a nobleman or royalty and he may even have had a saked attached to him. The word 'sak' was tattooed on the forearm with Indian ink and peacock bile; but if he served the king in some capacity he was tattooed below the armpit on the left side.

Doctor, after several cups of rice wine and amiable tolerance of an hour's interrogations and painstaking answers, glances at the polite Consul General (who has heard this tourist stuff a thousand times) and is moved to complete irrelevancy. To the confusion of the scion of royalty he launches full tide upon the subject of 'Pigs, Their Charm and Intelligence'.

"Have you ever considered the pig, Your Highness?"

## POISON ARROWS

he continues as though imparting a profound observation; "the pig is the cleanest and most intelligent of all animals. And self sacrificing! How often has the noble creature suffered tortures, given its life for the advancement of science and the preservation of the human race! You have your Siamese cats and your Siamese twins but what of the Siamese pig? I repeat. Pigs are the cleanest and most intelligent of all animals. If they are dirty and wallow in filth, it is because man has forced them to do so. The pig likes to wallow, yes, because his sweat glands are mostly missing and he chooses nice clean juicy mud if he can get it. But he is an adapter. He is not stupid enough to refuse filth if he cannot get better. I see that you are thinking: He eats swill. True: but again this shows his intelligence. For his job is to eat and grow fat at the rate of two pounds a day so he will be a good profit for his master. Do you know any other animal who can increase its weight like that? And he is selective. Just try him with half a dozen kinds of food in different containers where he can get at them at will. Does he swill everything down and eat until he bursts? No. He selects his proteins, and his carbohydrates and his mineral salts to make a balanced ration and he only eats just so much of it a day."

Doctor pauses for breath. A stunned silence ensues. Doctor takes on another instalment of rice-wine ammunition; proceeds:

"History has given us many citations of the pig. There was that affair with Ulysses—and the Swine into whom Christ cast the devils—h'm."

Hastily abandoning this angle as unfortunate, Doctor continues:

## BANGKOK

"The poets have sung about them. Have you ever heard that dainty quatrain:

'A little pig with a curly tail,  
'All pinky white and pearly pale,  
'Is a very different thing by far,  
'From the lumps of iniquity big pigs are'?

Although the last line is a libel on his porcine majesty—”  
Doctor pauses for inspiration.

“I have never considered the subject of pigs,” spoke up the young Prince with great dignity. “Other than as an edible of which the Chinese are very fond.”

The talk veers hastily to the Golden Hill and the Emerald Buddha, the beauty of Siamese hibiscus, one a red variety of single petals with long stamens—and other comprehensible topics.

The Prince explains that the Siamese classic drama which uses the gesture language, is divided into the khon, or Masked Play, and the lakon where the characters do not wear masks unless portraying animals or demons. Sometimes the lakon costumes are worn by the king. They are very gorgeous, made of silk shot with gold threads and sewn with jewels. The stories for these dances come from India but there is no record of just how.

“Perhaps,” I comment, “when the Thai, your ancient forefathers, captured Angkor they absorbed a great deal of the Hindu cult.”

“Very possibly. The khon tales are always some portion of the Ramayana, a favourite being that of the Hanuman, the Monkey King and White Elephants. The

## POISON ARROWS

very ancient forms of Siamese plays were the hun, literally meaning ‘model’, a kind of marionette, the figures moved by strings as in Europe but from below instead of above; and the nang, which means ‘skin’ or ‘hide’ and is a Shadow Play. The usual orchestra has at least five instruments—the xylophone, a set of gongs, a flageolet, a kind of tom-tom and a pair of drums.”

Doctor makes his peace with the Prince by declaring the Siamese dances to be the best he has seen and he has “seen plenty at Angkor and Java. I always take in the dances. Your Bangkok show has the finest costumes. Some of those brocades could stand alone, they are so stiff with gold and silver. They are all right, Prince.”

The party separates on this happy note, going its several ways through the warm quiet night.

To-day is dedicated to temples. Feeling reverent and absorbent, I take only a professional guide, leaving my convalescent friend the task of introducing Buddhistic monuments to her travel-logged Doctor. A glutton for thrills I make directly for the Emerald Buddha housed in Wat Phra Keo, the Royal Chapel. The streets are ablaze with colour; the piled-up fruits, the riotous flowers and the priests, hundreds of them in analine yellow cotton drapery, feet bare, heads shaved. Some carry pink lotos for the temples; others baskets and bowls of food for the gods, which has been begged and will ultimately be consumed by the gods’ self-appointed. The Siamese architecture contributes vivid beauty, lavish, overwhelming. Its rounded peaks and many knobs, mother-of-pearl inlay on wood and glass mosaic like gold jewels; its many coloured glass and carved stone figures, blazing

## BANGKOK

enamels and semi-precious stones are rich in artistry. They dazzle the tripper rushing from one sight to another, trying in a day to digest impressions of beauty that has been building for centuries.

We pass the Pu Khao Tong, the golden mountain, an artificial hill where is enshrined a portion of Buddha's bones discovered in eighteen hundred and ninety-eight in the ruins of Piprahwa stupa near the Nepalese border in India. The tall rounded towers of Wat Arun up the river are pointed out.

This temple is also known as Wat Cheng and as the Porcelain Temple. Its central tower, Phra Prang, two hundred and forty-five feet high, the most characteristic monument in Bangkok, dominates the landscape. It is exquisite against the early morning sky. A previous close-up leaves me with a feeling of wonder that a designer whose skill could transform tons of broken china plates into a covering for this stupa, could feel that such a bizarre treatment was worth while.

Across the river from Wat Cheng, also outside the city walls, is the Wat Saket. During the dry season its two pavilions are in daily use for cremations. My guide states that when the Siamese dead are cremated the bones are placed with the head towards the West and that the family often take some of the bones back to the home shrine 'to pay respect to them'.

Now as we enter that amazing collection of teakwood carvings, gleaming peacock blue enamels and glittering gold that is the Royal Temple, my guide explains that a wat is a collection of buildings of a Buddhist monastery; that a bot is the highest and central sacred chapel; and a vihan is another special hall, not sacred; and that there

## POISON ARROWS

are also libraries, monks' cells and domestic quarters in a wat.

The bot of the Emerald Buddha was started in seventeen hundred and eighty-five and being the king's own place of worship has never been allowed to decay. It stands in a courtyard paved in blinding white marble and containing many fantastic and vari-coloured shrines and images. It reflects the sun's rays like a mass of gold. Around the edges of the roofs made of many coloured tiles, little bells with silvery tones swing gently in the passing breeze, voicing a message of opulent peace.

The Buddha is cut from a solid piece of jasper about eighteen inches high. Its origin, whose hands carved the majestic folds, when and where, is buried in confusing traditions. History becomes definite that in the year nineteen hundred and seventy-nine after the death of Buddha Gotama, which is fourteen hundred and thirty-six of the Christian era, a small pagoda in the Kingdom of Chiengmai was struck by lightning and the jasper image discovered. After devious journeying it was installed on the present gorgeous altar in seventeen hundred and eighty-four A.D.

As we proceed to the King's Palace, I notice the nine towers on the eastern side of the temple ground. The roof of each is done in a different glaze of enamel to correspond to the colours of the nine planets.

Then ensued a phantasmagoria of Buddhas. At Wat Po is the largest one in the world, the reclining colossus, one hundred and sixty feet long, nearly forty feet high. At Wat Benchamabopit are rows of them in bronze, in alabaster, in stone, all the types of Buddhas known in

## BANGKOK

Siam, in Burma, India, Japan. At Wat Bavaranives, the residence of Buddha's High Patriarch, is one from the Thirteenth Century behind golden curtains. Buddhas, Buddhas big and little, carved and cast, gorgeous and tawdry. Then I pass to more wealth and glitter in the Throne Hall where the jewelled regalia and ivory throne are housed.

It is a relief to look at a group of human little boys squatting on a covered platform learning to be little bonzes. This is a Buddhist stronghold. A large proportion of the male population goes through the priest stage. Younger or older they put on the yellow robe and take the begging bowl. Many of them continue for life and go into monasteries to become the dedicated bhikkhu (monks). They do not need a special training for entering this freemasonry of those who believe with Gotama Buddha that the part is absorbed in the whole and the escape from the rounds of rebirths is to deny the claim of the body.

The droning voices of young Siam are still intoning the sutras as I leave the bewildering lavishness of the temples. Probably some of this very group in time will be conning the Boy Scout Manual and learning to point sticks (symbolic weapons) into the backs of their brothers, while learning to drill as Boy Scouts.

Later I come to a halt before a miserable little specimen of a white elephant in the Royal Enclosure. The god Indra rode a white elephant. Royalty in Siam rode, and on occasion still rides, a white elephant. The little dirty-grey beast has a special house and special attendants. My thought travels to that far Moï land from whence he and his like have come. Because of being a freak in the

## POISON ARROWS

elephant world his is a special fate—cakes and ale, or its equivalent in a king's entourage.

The Royal Palace, along modern lines, although convenient, does not charm. But a walk through the Sam-peng bazaars, Lantern Lane and Bridge of Stores does. Here, if the possessor of a fat pocket-book, one revels in beaten silver, porcelain, silk, flower chains, lanterns, masks, toys or even acquires a rare bit in a pawnshop for antiques.

Bangkok has still in reserve for me one final sequence of fascination. I embark in a sampan for the Floating Markets with Mrs. American-Resident who shares my enthusiasm for the picturesque. She told me of the Plowing Ceremony which takes place at rice planting time and of the kite-flying field especially set apart for this pastime which now is being supplanted by boxing and other European sports.

As our sampan is poled along a branch of the Menam, the mystery of a tropical river quiets the senses. Small nipa-thatched huts nestle amid the palms and tangled greenery, so close that their supporting stilts are in the water. Many of them have queer little boxes the size of birdcages swung on trees overhanging the river. They are the spirit houses. A strain of animistic belief puts a string around each to keep out evil spirits and supplies it with offerings, a bit of fruit, a few kernels of rice.

Suddenly a grey hairy body lands from nowhere almost at my feet, chatters, snarls and jumps away again to an overhanging tree. Recovering from this startling visit of a pet gibbon, I get a photograph as it reaches out a powerful skinny hand for bananas.

The river widens into a canal. We thread a skilful way

## BANGKOK

among the crowds of sampans each piled with market produce. The scene is riotous with colour, the sampans weave in and out in orderly confusion. Their pyramided fruits, vegetables in baskets and neat mounds, the sarongs and scarves of the vendors, purple and red bougainvillea on the huts make a huge palette of vivid tints splashed with a lavish hand.

A medley of sounds assails the ear pleasantly. They are low calls of the boatmen for right of way; hawking of wares by the market folk; dogs barking; a detachment of Boy Scouts, in shorts and yellow silk neckerchiefs, singing. A gentleman in the silk sampot and alpaca coat of the quality is bargaining noisily for oranges and a school boy is vociferously offering to sell ti leaves, which he calls 'plu', for wrapping parcels.

With Mrs. American-Resident's help I become culinary minded and take note of the food so temptingly displayed. There is Siamese sugar cane (*oie*); fried cakes, and cooked rice in 'chattys'; ducks and white cocks; lavender and tobacco; medicine including cocaine; ground nuts; cabbage, squash, artichokes.

The fruits always piled symmetrically, especially contributed to the charm of the unforgettable kaleidoscope. Teasing the eye as well as the tongue are mangostines, limes, bulbous jackfruit; namping, a gourd; chimoya and a fruit like lamut, small, brown and quite sweet; melon, called chung-mo; the ubiquitous banana and evil-smelling durien, large, warty and dark ugly green.

Those colourful water markets of old Bangkok, like the canals of Venice, hold unending charm. Often they will come before that inward eye with splashes of moving colour. If only I could linger until this enticing city

## POISON ARROWS

reveals to me under its modern draperies the riches of its ancient beauty. But the fixed date on my calendar, marked 'Bali Cremation', indicates departure.

Early next morning, I take the bi-weekly Express in a comfortable sleeper, like an American Pullman compartment car, which makes a thirty hour trip from Bangkok to Penang and the Federated Malay States.

Two places especially, along that railway, entice me to stop for a visit. At Patalung starts a highway of picturesque beauty through one of the wildest and most fascinating spots in Siam. Virgin forests cover the slopes of Mount Tenasserin. As one twists in and out, past giant trees lush with riotous leafage there comes a thrilling response to nature in her lavish tropical mood.

Here and there the jungle is broken by plantations of rubber and cocoanut and the food staples, rice and bananas.

Patalung itself is a quaint town over a thousand years old which claims to have originated the Siamese Shadow Play. Its name, Nang Talung means the Leather of Patalung. This amusement is still highly popular in Southern Siam. It reminds me of the Punch and Judy shows which the French populace still loves. The puppets are made very carefully of stiff leather and although during a performance only arms, legs and jaws move and only shadows appear on the big white sheet, every detail of the costumes and jewellery is painstakingly depicted. The drama enacted is usually from the Hindu mythology and the operators of the puppets behind the semi-transparent screen recite the story in a monotonous falsetto. One night I join the native audience squatting on the ground in front of a small hut built for the purpose

## BANGKOK

of housing the curtain and watch the grotesque shadows antic through a nearly interminable performance. The audience appears captivated. Unsophistication has its reward in the capacity to enjoy hour after hour this simple pastime.

The other old town I stop at is Nagor Sridharmaraj, not far away. Once a strong kingdom it dominated the Malay Peninsula until five hundred years ago the rise of Malay power destroyed its authority. To-day it is a province of Siam with many beautiful temples, that of Wat Nahathadu, over ten centuries old. Its proud claim to interest is being the father of the 'Niello' or Tompat work, one of Siam's most beautiful forms of art.

My luggage bulges with these exquisite tomPAT pieces—teapots, bowls, cigarette boxes—the intricate carved designs in silver gleaming on a dull background. They are fitting souvenirs of Siam, a country rich in art and tradition, harnessed to that tricky steed, Progress.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### PENANG—A LETTER TO STURDZA

THE KEDAH, a Straits settlement boat, steams out of Penang harbour at six o'clock for Singapore. Across the sea due west Sumatra beckons. Its strange animals and peoples and customs call alluringly; also the rubber estates where Americans have vast interests and a few favoured ones live like overlords in their domain of almost endless acres of caout-chouc (*ficus elastica*) and latex. But the cremation date at Bali is an unmovable black mark on the calendar—among so many siren calls I must remain faithful to the original. I am seeking primitive peoples in various stages of civilization, not rubber barons, sweating—in splendid surroundings, but sweating nevertheless, to create more wealth for the American capitalist.

A sweet melancholy holds me. Penang, receding in the setting sun, draws a fade-out on the Indo China adventure. There is nothing to be done about it. No cutting and splicing that reel to make a throwback sequence nearer to the heart's desire.

I go into the crowded bar where all the passengers seem to have congregated with the same thought of a cooling beverage, principally the stinger, a whisky and soda, or the Singapore gin sling, a long, pink, good drink. The tables are overflowing with Dutch families.

## PENANG

A new silhouette of ample spread and white shirt sleeves appears. The slim light figure of Malay and Siam and Indo China, the heavier but dapper French Colonial, is lost in the weight of this sturdier race. Quiet-footed Malay Chinese boys bring drinks and more drinks. The noise, heat, Dutch language, confusion force a quick escape. Sipping a lemon squash, the fifth of the day, I stand by the rail and reminisce.

It is very hot, only two degrees north of the Equator, eighty-two degrees mean temperature but not 'mean' if one stays quiet, preferably under a punkah, now driven electrically. What a trying country this must have been before electricity provided ice so that oneself and one's food can be kept in artificial coolness! I shudder to think of it. But picturesque always—I watch a fruit vendor on the dock carrying gracefully her tray of oranges, bananas and several acid fruits, one the colour of potatoes with small black seeds, and herself in splashing reds and greens, and the many ships that ride the harbour from the world ports, carrying thirteen millions of gold dollars worth in rubber, rice, tapioca that forms its annual commerce. It is beautiful, this harbour second only to Singapore, set in wooded hills where forts are hidden and, on the Malay side ten miles across, rimmed in silver-sanded beaches. The *President Hayes*, A Dollar boat, is passing us, bound for Rangoon from Singapore, the *Comorin* over there is bound for Ceylon. All the races in the East mingle here. The Chinese are in great number and do most of the trading. There are ninety thousand of them in a population numbering one hundred and fifty thousand. The Malays, whose language is spoken principally are in the majority many more men than women but there are the

## POISON ARROWS

Hindus, Mohammedans, Sikhs, and a handful of Europeans, barely two thousand. Everywhere is colour; bright silk coats with sarongs, khaki trousers or shorts—white drill, tan drill, khaki made in European fashion and fitting badly from much washing.

Penang or Georgetown is situated on the Island of Penang (Betel-Nut) fifteen miles long, nine miles wide with an area of a hundred and eight square miles. It was the first British Settlement in the Malay Peninsula, ceded by the Rajah of Kedah to the great East India Company back in 1786 (when certain Thirteen States were undergoing birth pangs becoming a nation) and by 1805 ranked as a Presidency equal with Bombay and Madras. It was not until 1836 that it lost the seat of the Government to Singapore even then assuming the proud position of the Lion's Gate, the foremost metropolis of the East. To-day with Penang and Malacca it forms the Straits Settlements. Established as a free port by the foresight of Sir Stamford Raffles, Singapore is now the strongest military base of the British in the Far East.

While piracy picturesque and ruthless no longer harasses Penang as it did in the early nineteenth century it is still a treacherous country for germ infection.

Before coming on board I had an excellent tiffin with Mr. and Mrs. Head-of-the-U.S. Rubber-Malayan-Plantation. At their charming home was the wife of the manager of some British tin mines. She had been laid up for weeks with an infected leg that started with a small scratch and threatened to become gangrenous. She has come down from the interior for medical attention that may save her life.

The white women here seem to be pale or over-rouged,

## PENANG

too thin or too fat from the climate. The coloured wash-silk dress, made simple for the tub, is almost a uniform. When the children are nine or ten years old comes the wrench of parting. They must 'go home' to be educated. Not half an hour ago on the dock I heard:

"Good-bye. Cheerio. Don't forget me. I'll be along next year." It was spoken by a bravely smiling mother to a little boy, travelling, in charge of the ship's Purser, down to Singapore. There he will be met by friends and taken on the long journey back to an American school. As it chances, the progressive school selected is in my home town on the Atlantic seaboard, so I shall see this lad again. His mother has had to choose between her duty to her child and to her husband, who is a Standard Oil official. He gets six months furlough every three years. A fascinating life is this of the transplanted ones. It holds novelty, power and heartbreaks.

A really comfortable hotel is the Runnymede at Penang, delightfully cool, on the water, smooth green stretches of sward under big trees. It has an excellent runner service from the hotel. For a moderate charge all transportation is taken care of. Each piece of luggage costs twenty-five cents (plus ten cents for the coolie) and for all transportation, myself included (plus a fifty cent tip) only two Straits' dollars. (\$1.75 in gold.) One's luggage is no longer one's concern every moment as in Indo China.

True; but some flavour is missing. Something I had kept at bay in the whirligig of Bangkok companioned by friends. Must I confess that it is the dreamer of dreams?

The Gates of Wonder are barred to those who cannot

## POISON ARROWS

bring to them sympathetic understanding—the will to perceive nature's world, any world different from one's own, to know beauty, to dream true and pick reality from the changing kaleidoscope of senses and emotions.

So be it. The evening is fading into purple and Penang with it. I will think of Penang.

Three outstanding memories here are the cattle with painted horns, red, green and yellow and the Snake Temple where a pretty little poisonous wriggler, a grass snake, seems to be the chief object of devotion at shrines, lighted only by votive candles in a dim interior. More light in a corridor revealed pythons and water moccasins, fortunately behind glass or wire.

The third treasured bit of memory is a visit to a collector of ceramics. He has two perfect Tang horses and a mended burial jar, twenty-three B.C.

I clap my hands and order a stinger from the boy who responds to this easy way of summoning service. Alcohol gives me a tired reaction but it is a great temptation to brace up on something, one gets so slack, and twilight is the melancholy hour.

"May I join you?" says a pleasant American voice emanating from a middle-aged, well-dressed person at my elbow.

"Boy, two stingers. My name is Bradley, James Bradley from Cincinnati, doing the usual travel trip and I have ventured to speak to you because I feel I know you. I had your guide. Picked him up at Aranya-Pradesa. I hired your motor that was sending him back to Phnom-Penh. I had three days of you while he showed me Angkor, and, frankly, I am rather curious."

He has a quizzical smile. I match his smile and conceal,

## PENANG

I hope, the curiosity to know just what Sturdza has said.

"Poor man! You seem to have survived. If Baron Sturdza substituted me for his Mummy in his Niagara of speech, you must have had a deluge of unknown femininity poured over you."

"Yes. He gave me an earful. But I heard about his Mummy too. It is all right. You need not be worried. I heard about a lot of things and his trip with you—and the twenty dollar gold pocket piece and—and—your affair with him."

"Worried? Affair? Baron Sturdza is a gentleman. I am sure he could not have said anything unpleasant." But I was not so sure. What had that pipe-dreamer said to him?

"Oh! He told me all about it. You out there in the wilds, among the Moïs. It must have been pretty exciting. But I do not see how you dared to take him. He is pretty European——"

"Well?" Is the man going to make me ask him!  
"Perhaps he met a new specimen—an American."

"That's right. He was tremendously impressed that you two could be all the time together in such strange places and remain only friends. He was very proud of himself and his control. I remember he said many times: 'And the brave thing about it is that I forebore to spoil the dream of friendship by the colour of passion'."

I smile. The gods laugh, ha, ha! He forebore forsooth! I remember that last night at Angkor when intellectual curiosity and primal impulses were rampant—and was glad. What every woman knows; to make up her mind and then to make up her man's mind.

"Have a stinger—on me, Mr. Bradley of Cincinnati."

## POISON ARROWS

We have the drinks. I drift away, inwardly shivering at how many times that trip to Moi-land would be broadcast by my voluble Hungarian when talkative with opium. In the writing-room I evolve the following epistle:

On Board the *Kedah*, February, 193—

“I am sailing out of Penang Harbour in a very comfortable boat—the blazing sun (and it is hot) is settling behind the Penang Hills—they rise abruptly from the sea in a rugged blue outline—very beautiful—the first leisure moment since we parted. I loved being at Penang.

The *Rivaymeade* has running hot water in a real bath tub, modern. My room faced the sea and gardens and moon and sunrise. And there were kind friends. The head of the vast U.S. Rubber interests has smoothed the way, bought my tickets, secured my cabin, cabled to be met, etc. I have been under the magic wing of power here.

In Bangkok, the days were equally starred with kindness. What a contrast to Indo China, that strange country of suspicion, meanness, overcharges and hard travel. The Siamese Railroad is clean, well run, well equipped, not the abomination called a railroad in Annam and I have not had a ‘nervous’ moment about my luggage since Aranya-Pradesa, our ‘white elephants’ of bags and ‘sore fingers’ of bundles are no longer a trouble. How you used to struggle with them!

Wish you could enjoy this enchanted scene, for you love beauty. The indigo tropical night is drawing down, but the curtain is still shot with flames of

## PENANG

orange and many wooded islands gem a green and rippling sea.

Many thoughts rise to say to you, but the censor says: 'He is European and may misunderstand.' But at least you know if there is anything I can do to further your interests I will be glad to do so. You are an ill-starred victim of a too-royal past. Your strange luckless history comes often to my mind. Keep a tight hand on the opium. Do not let it sink you for I believe you can still come back to the world of business and a gentle life. May the gold eagle bring you luck.

Write me about your impressions of the Moïs and remember that I am your sincere friend but do not use me as a topic of conversation no matter how brilliant you could make it. You have many avenues of reminiscences and I should hate being made the conversational football of your agile speech regardless of how complimentary it might be. I know you understand, for you are understanding; and the great adventure of the unknown insoumis country is for your quiet hours and for the kang, your couch of dreams, untarnished by mistakes.

Wishing you success and health, G.T.S."

Dismissing Sturdza and his Indo China from the foreground, as a true traveller should, already seeking that rainbow pot of gold of the next journey, I turn to the delights and problems that a new country provides. No more shall the ghosts of Indo China clank their chains, nor lure with their pipe dreams. The Moïs and their strange ways, the mocking faces of sinister Bayon, the

## POISON ARROWS

glee-mad limbs of fantastic dancers in frozen pictures of a vanished race, all shall be forgotten.

The gentle beauty of Bali is waiting to give its message. In that Lotos eating land, if report be true, my spirit shall relax among a people more Arcadian than primitive, where harsh, ugly things are forgotten. A perfumed life of gentle order and easy living, where spirit and body express a harmony of music, religion and love.

BOOK TWO  
THE LOTOS ISLE OF BALI  
A VIGNETTE OF HAPPY PEOPLE

## BALI

Oh lovely Isle, Oh verdant pearl!  
Set in the brow of farthest Ind.  
Your wet rice fields in mirrors swirl  
Upon the breast of vale and hill.

Your treasures are straight bodies, lithe  
With ivory grace in dance or play;  
And temples where rich carvings writhe  
Of Nagas, scrolled with Hindu gods.

Show us how love with rhythmic fire,  
In full-lipped ease from Nature's lore,  
Weaves magic spell on quivering lyre.  
Give us your wreath of tropic joy!\*

\*Set to music by Dorothy Radde Emery. From the Tropic Suite. No. 1 Duet. Copyright by Grace Thompson Seton.

卷之三

## CHAPTER I

### THE 'DUTCH WIFE'—SANG-YANG GOD DANCE

IT is a breathless morning at the Den Pasar Hotel in South Bali. I throw my 'Dutch wife' far across the room. Even that hard roll of hair, gleaming white in its linen cover, is too hot. What fool thinks the tropics are relaxing when this fire of hellish heat burns in one's veins! A fat Dutchman might find a silly contraption like that huge bologna sausage cooler to rest a leg on; but—thought is arrested by seeing a stream of ants in ceaseless procession over the cement floor. Some of the tiny workers are carrying bits of cake to the next room to a drain in the corner, where a square, built of tiles and cement, serves as a bathtub. Beside it on a cement pedestal stands a large cask filled with water. From the rim hangs a wooden ladle with which to dip up half a gallon or so of the reviving fluid and to sluice it over a fevered skin.

"Plucky little devils! Doing more than I am, making the most of their opportunities. If I—Jehovah—having left the cake last night (a dumb stupid thing to do) now take it away, isn't that the workings of an inscrutable fate for them? I know from my wider vision that I left the good food from indifference. Now that it has attracted a stream of ants from the drain, which is displeasing to me, I remove the good thing, which has lost

## POISON ARROWS

its value to me, and deprive the little creatures of joy and life."

I struggle to a sitting position and then out through the mosquito curtains of my hard bed bound for the Dutch bath; but first I retrieve the small pillow from the floor, throw it in a chair and become fate for the ants. I make no attempt to kill them. Why kill? There are so many more. Instead, employing strategy, I put the cake crumbs down the drain, thereby removing the ants as well.

Temporarily refreshed I look at the clock, it indicates 5.30 a.m. With a shrug I ring for early coffee, wrap a silk gown over pyjamas, thrust feet in snakeskin slippers, no one but a fool or a native goes barefoot in the East, and drop into a long chair on my veranda.

I am but recently come to South Bali where the untrammelled, healthy bodies of these graceful people strike a fresh note of beauty. Idly my thoughts play on this island of two thousand square miles and perhaps a million of happy people, happy or more nearly so than any civilization, primitive or sophisticated, that I know.

Lazily I sort out impressions of the past four weeks which have been woven into a pattern of delight. After a night from Sourabaya and a sunrise breakfast, I was disgorged from the Dutch steamer into a sampan, which hopped like a flea upon the restless waters of Bali's only port at the north of the island. Boeleleng received me with equatorial ardour. Its glaring quayside and clamorous porters held small seduction and gratefully I allowed myself to be bundled into the comparative cool of a covered motor going to Singaradja, the capital and principal town of North Bali two miles away.

TRAVEL — EVERYWHERE IN BALI



## THE 'DUTCH WIFE'

A few miles further at Bratan I was bewitched by a shopkeeper, a 'Princess Patimah,' who was there to show me gold and silver cloths woven in exquisite designs in crimson silk; to slip on my finger an orange-gold ring heavy with carving and Balinese rubies and to tempt me with gossamer dreams fixed in silver—boxes and bottle stoppers—wrought by cunning, unhurried workers at the loom and jeweller's bench.

From Bratan, on a perfect road, I motored to Sangsit temple rich with carvings in the larger medium of stone. Then more miles through a long tunnel of pleasant shade to the baths at Tedjakoeta where even the horses have pools of living water to splash in. Cold from the mountains it gushes from marble mouths into stone receptacles. The baths are carved and artified by skilful hands. Carvings, carvings were everywhere in Bali—obscene little images in clay or wood and cocoanut shells in lace-like patterns polished to a gleaming brown. I saw weavings and more weavings of grass and cotton and silk, things to carry, things to wear! I acquired a tobacco pouch worked in a fine criss-cross of black and white bamboo fibre.

The people here live close to nature, grow straight as tiger lilies, fill their woods and ricefields with demi-gods and express themselves in the flowing rhythm of their wood and metal instruments—a living music. Every act at home or afield is companioned by their tree, air, water and tutelary spirits—a living art, a living religion. Some new flavour has this little oasis amid the world's self-conscious and greedy nations.

Thus back and forth I lingered in the northern part of the island before coming towards the southern part

## POISON ARROWS

where the life of the folk is even less touched by alien influence.

My thoughts strayed to three days before when I went upwards on the smooth ribbon of road some five thousand feet to Kintamani and its volcano, set like a jewel in the amethyst clouds. It was not long after I left the comfortable mountain rest house at Kintamani, where I slept under double blankets, I saw a curious device. On a tall cocoanut palm long wisps of grass had been twisted together and tied around the trunk in four places, each having a long tail sticking out and downwards. These acted as water-catchers diverting the rain as it beat against the smooth bark and caused a steady trickle down one side to a bamboo bucket below. A most ingenious rain-catcher that takes advantage of every brief but copious downpour. I have seen this identical device in the wild Ifagao Mountain Province of Luzon. What connection, racial or spontaneous, is there between the Philippines and the Dutch East?

I am recalled to South Bali and the Den Pasar Hotel by Peer Mawith's cultured voice. It breaks in upon my lazy reflections with a "Good morning" over the thin partition.

Being unable to sleep he is seeking a breath of early morning coolness on his veranda, which is the same as mine and runs along the whole length of the hotel. A certain amount of privacy is provided by partitions separating one's veranda space from that of one's neighbour. Open at the top, they are an interruption of vision but not of sound. Two feet below, the walk pursues a straight course past a dozen porches like ours. No one violates one's privacy from the open front. No one even

## THE 'DUTCH' WIFE'

looks in. It is as though one were protected by a Chinese stage property, an imaginary screen.

I sip coffee, nibble toast and tell him about ants and philosophy while he sips coffee and eats a banana on his side of the partition. Peer now has something to say that cannot be common property. He comes close to the partition near the front and sends a sibilant whisper around it.

"I say, have you seen old Garvin and his Dutch girl? His courier he calls her. Noticed he did not introduce you last night at dinner. Left her flat."

"Probably did not expect to meet New York here," I laugh back. "But everyone knows Charles Garvin. It was a surprise meeting him."

"You two were in a huddle at dinner——"

"Curious? I was telling him of the sacred Sang-Yang dance where little girls are possessed by the gods. Melati, a lovely Balinese girl you have seen with me, has invited me to a Sang-Yang ceremony to-night. Charles Garvin wants to come along. Perhaps you would like to join us? I think Melati can get us all into the temple yard. It is not a tourist show. It is a very real part of the Balinese religious life. They do it only in full moon when evil fortune has befallen the village and the gods must be propitiated. The devil god of night is more powerful on moonlight nights than any other time."

"That's splendid. I'll be on hand. They are a strange people. Have been here a month. Never saw such beautiful bodies, such colours and tints. I paint and paint all day. I must go now soon. It will take me all next winter in Paris to finish my studies. You must look me up. Same place. Have had it for years—after I

## POISON ARROWS

stopped trying to live in New York. But about Charles—you know I do not care a sou what he does. He is over sixty and has lived a fat life and is not going to stop now. It's his faulty technique that bothers me. Why not have a trained nurse—a little gout or something. Anyone as well known as he is, with a business reputation to sustain—the public is so fussy these days about the private affairs of multi-millionaires—— It's stupid to assume he will not meet Americans here.”

“Poof! Why worry?” I riposte from my side of the partition, eating pomolo and trying to make it seem like grape-fruit. “We are lucky to be here *now*. Since the Dutch have begun to exploit Bali, it will be crowded with tourists and these lovely people will become body-conscious. As for Garvin, his wife divorced him recently. Could not stand being obliged to entertain the latest interest in musical comedy. Charles' tastes are so catholic. Like most ageing men he clutches youth; its snap and magnetism. Besides, he is rather an attractive big somebody. If he were not, of course he could buy it, but perhaps you are too continental. Charles may find that hard little personality, with its low heels, its tailored clothes, emitting English in raucous tones, yet well-featured, fresh-complexioned—is like my ‘Dutch wife’, hard, efficient, comfortable.”

“Phut!” comes over the partition.

I rise preparatory to taking another heavenly moment of cool wetness before the subsequent struggle with garments that cling and drag over a perspiring skin. How very sensible of the Balinese to wear nothing but a fine cotton cloth folded about their hips.

But Peer is not finished. Has indeed been leading up to



## THE 'DUTCH WIFE'

something. "Oh, I say, don't go inside until you promise to help me out."

I wait. Is he interested in the Dutch girl? She is young, athletic, and not bad looking. Her careful Dutch-English pronounced in a too strident voice, perhaps is an ill-concealed embarrassment in what may be a novel position for her. She may have parents to support. With Peer Mawith it is always a search for beauty exemplified in the feminine form.

"What's her name?" I tease.

"Why, you can get her. You will, won't you? It's your Melati. She is so beautiful! Those eyes, those shoulders! She will pose for me if *you* ask her. You two seem to be great friends."

Melati. Happy with her own people! Thinking shyly of Wyan, friend of her brother, Ninga, the third born, and happy with her own people! Carefree, except for her god devotions. Shall I intrude the Parisian Faust in this Garden? Peer will paint her, love her if he can and forget her. And Melati, what good to her? She does not need money; the pure chalice of her simple life will be coloured, probably muddied. Trivial, episodic for him; focal, revolutionizing for her. No! Not if I can prevent it.

"Leave her to me. I will see what can be done—if you will promise to let me plan it."

"*Bien*," agrees Peer. Product of a Dutch father, whom he does not remember, and a French mother, he is Parisian, with a dash of American, acquired during five years in New York. Now at fifty he has money by inheritance, comfortably equipped to pursue his talent as a painter. *Dilettante, connoisseur, bonvivant*; the French words

## POISON ARROWS

describe him. And withal he has a saving urge for beauty that escapes always from the imprisoning flesh to soar into the spirit. Escaping him, yet ever luring towards fresh possibilities.

However much the magic island of Bali might be spoiled by the future rush of American tourists in the Dutch ships, Melati at least may be saved from Peer's sophistication. But *how*?

I must find a way—perhaps Charles Garvin and his 'Dutch Wife' may be of use in some harmless strategy.

Meanwhile to-night the two little virgins are rehearsing the god dances. Fate takes a hand here. At nine o'clock a youth arrives to conduct us. Some household duty detains Melati. She substitutes her brother, Ninga. Good! Peer will have no chance, even if inclined to break faith.

Through the warm, smooth, silent night I set out with my three escorts, the pompous American, the portly Frenchman and the slim Balinese. We keep in the middle of the village street, the dirty road and gutter have a disconcerting way of mingling, and the patches of grass are too popular with the occasional snake, lizard and scorpion. A hyphen between Charles Garvin and Peer Mawith, arms in lock, we cautiously follow Ninga's barefooted heels. His graceful shape is barely distinguishable in the blackness. Garvin regrets a flashlight, Peer the moon. Twenty minutes of this.

We stop beside a long high stone wall. In it, four feet from the ground, is a door. Some rough loose stones make precarious footing to climb to the opening and down into the temple compound. Ninga precedes, like a cat, to show us the way. My unathletic and portly escorts

## THE 'DUTCH WIFE'

scramble through the opening with what dignity they can preserve.

A weird sight is lighted by several torches. At one side near a small shrine are two priests intoning a chant which is periodically broken by a rhythmic refrain from a group of half a dozen women and boys standing near. At the feet of each priest is a woman squatting on the ground. Across her lap is the inert form of a little girl, perhaps five or six years old, dressed in the gold and jewelled fineries of the temple dancers. Each little girl in her mother's lap lies motionless, a priestly hand extended over her. Incense of sandal and spices floats towards us. A solemn hush, broken only by low chanting, lighted only by the cocoanut flares and a clouded moon.

Ninga whispers that the priests have now hypnotized the two virgins, and it remains to be seen if the gods will possess them, and offer worship through them to Tintiya, the Great Breath.

"This is worth the whole trip," murmurs Garvin, "no fake here."

Slowly the larger of the two girls appears to come to life. She raises herself gently from her mother's lap, stands erect, postures and sways, recovers poise and glides to the open space of the compound. She begins to dance. At first uncertainly, then with increasing power. The other child also arises, staggers a little, and joins her.

From Ninga in my ear: "The gods are pleased. These two will dance in the temple festa. No one has taught them. They are god taught. It will be a good Sang-Yang."

Back and forth, kneeling and twisting, arms flung out

## POISON ARROWS

and sideways, fingers fluttering, making patterns in the air—all the complicated motions of the ritual dance, done with precision and power. How could these babies know about it, how execute its difficult figures? On and on they dance to the rhythmic, melodious chanting, without a sign of fatigue. Under the full moon, now clear silver, the temple's walls rise black around them.

The important Charles Garvin for a moment glimpses a world outside his money-bound sphere.

He murmurs: "The East has mysteries—can't explain —very strange——"

Peer is making quick notes on the back of an envelope, rough outlines of the little fantastic figures twisting, turning, the fluttering hands, the crouching mothers, the chanters and the priests.

"It's like an opium dream," he whispers.

Tut! Why did he have to say that? Another night of moonlight dancing is already swirling around me. Vital ghosts of Angkor—hot purple, scarlet orange limned in black: they intrude upon the Balinese picture. They have no place in this sweet setting of luscious rose and gold, rich sepia and tender green.

I pull him away. Ninga is motioning that we should be going before the 'rehearsal' breaks up and our presence is noted. We stumble up the crude steps through the high door in the wall, back to the dusty street. In silence, deeply stirred by an incredible scene, alien to our thought and experience, we go through the dim, smooth night.

At the door of our hotel we part with nods. Only Garvin, the conventional, says: "Many thanks. Most extraordinary. Wouldn't have missed it."

## CHAPTER II

### FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI—MY FRIEND MELATI

THE next morning after the six o'clock breakfast, I step along the village street past the pigs and children playing in the dust and come to Melati's kampong (home enclosure). A few feet before the open gateway is a screen which blocks the way. It stops evil spirits from entering the enclosure as such undesirables travel only in a straight line. I step around it, thinking that my scruples are silly, why not do this friendly act for Peer? But as I greet Melati the words will not come—the affair must wait. Why cloud this picture, perfect in its delicate primitive beauty? Shamelessly I dismiss the matter for the moment.

Melati's home is a typical one in South Bali and she, although more beautiful and intelligent, is a typical Balinese maiden. Her gentle trusting simplicity makes quick intimacy possible. My vital picture of this entrancing island, set to the tropical rhythm, resolves itself into an impression of this gentle girl. Others have limned the sights and beauties they have found here. To me the soul of Bali is expressed in Melati.

This morning under the banyan tree Melati is weaving. We chat about many things. My clumsy Malay only pegs the real interpretation that flows sympathetically between us.

## POISON ARROWS

In the black cloud of Melati's carefully looped hair a yellow hibiscus nestles. Her hair is drawn away from an ivory tinted face as creamy smooth as the flower whose name Melati bears. Dark eyes, seductive, slumbrous, are set above a short, straight nose, piquantly broadened and flattened. Her full red lips are nature's lure as honey to bees. Slim liteness, a languorous calm of strength and ease pervades Melati. She is no female slave cowering away from her master. Burdens she carries, work she performs; as a free woman she labours, cooks and spins.

She worships Tintiya, the Great Breath, by praying to a hundred lesser gods and to Danhjang Assa, the tutelary genius of her desa (village), who must be propitiated by many flowers, by kali, the shallow rose, and by those pink fragrant blossoms of the asana that Pontianak, the cruel spirit ever haunting the sacred waringen (banyan) tree, loves to wind in her glossy black hair—wherein there is great virtue.

Melati shivers a little when she remembers how cruel is this Pontianak, the soul of a dead virgin who never knew love, and whose long black hair conceals a gaping wound in her back. To kiss her is death, unless the man is brave enough to snatch a hair before she flies away mockingly. Then, if he wishes, the man lives to a ripe age, the husband of a Rajah's daughter and the father of princes.

This morning as I watch her weave, Melati tells me this legend and of other thoughts and things that pattern her life. She smiles as she pats her own gleaming locks. Although she is not a princess, has she not a double crown, two whorls of hair, which means great good

## FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI

fortune will come to her? Deftly she makes a long loop of her hair, doubled back upon itself and again looped back in itself. Using no pins she pulls out a few strands of hair and twists them around the two-looped knot on the left side of her head, taking care that a wisp of hair is left out of the knot to denote that she is unmarried.

To insure her good luck Melati never fails to place a cup of rice and many bamboo tassels in the little spirit house on the bamboo pole at her front gate, never forgets to say a prayer each time, that no evil spirit flies over the high wall separating her kampong from the road. Nor does she fail to pray at sundown as she carries a little leaf full of rice and bananas to the private family temple where for many moons her uncle and grandmother have been resting. Their bones correctly dried and folded into a neat bundle encased in the finest batik kain the family could buy, all ready, waiting for the next 'Big Burning' that would be in a few days. It is this Big Cremation which has drawn me to Bali, a strange gorgeous ceremony that is usually held in the autumn, but a big dignitary, the Dingit Rajah, has died and a special Cremation is ordered at Abiantibul.

I admire the sarong of glittering gold, half finished, upon which Melati is working.

When Melati does her stint at weaving she first places a big square mat of woven palm upon the ground under the waringen tree. Ninga helps her to adjust the heavy wooden pieces across it, supported by low uprights. Sitting on her feet she slips her bent legs under the loom and puts the wooden cross at her back. She attaches the threads of the woof to make a three or four foot width for her kain (cloth) which, of course, will be either a

## POISON ARROWS

sarong or slandang (scarf). Then monotonously, neatly, tiresomely, back and forth she slips the shuttle of brown, red or perchance gold, which she warps into place and presses close to its neighbour thread. A backward movement tightens the backbar for an instant and again the shuttle moves for the next thrust. Melati likes to weave, she can think and dream, except that the backbar makes her loins ache. It never occurs to her to try to make some adjustment. Her mother taught Melati how to weave as her mother's mother had done before that. Always cloth is made that way. It is pleasant under the waringen tree and often two or three of her neighbours sit on the top rail of the bamboo fence separating the next kampong and chat of the cock-fight in the next dessa, of the god dances, and lately of the sacred bull coffin being made for the Great Burning.

As it grows hotter Melati takes the white cloth from her head, wipes her face and, with a quick gesture, wraps it around her head again and resumes her weaving to the end of the row.

Leaving the loom Melati goes with me to the nearby poera, her special temple of Soekwati, halfway between Gianjar and Den Pasar, to give thanks for the new crops and the joy that is life. No poera is so rich in arabesque of stone. The carved pinnacles of Soekwati rise like lacy fingers to the sky. Many of them, she tells me, were chiselled by her father and now by Ninga. Once a week they leave their sawah (rice-field) soaking in water, or the young rice plants started, and spend the day carving free-hand on the temple walls. They chisel the topengs (masks) over the faces of the gods; or make writhing nagas (sacred serpents) and conventional patterns of

THE NEW STRIPS CUT INTO  
THE RUGGED HOLE THINGS

## FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI

flowers and fruits, in the self-same way that the priests had taught her fore-fathers, in the temples of South India.

Every month they contribute a few days' carvings at the temple as their share of the usual offerings that every man makes from his share of earnings. Often Melati brings them rice, hot with peppery lombok, and perhaps a mango or chimoya or that red-whiskered fruit, the rambutan.

Now Ninga is carving the new Padu raksa, the gateway that had crumbled when the earth gave the big shakes. She was too little to remember for she is ktat, the fifth born. Sometimes Ninga draws with a burnt stick on the rough red stone the design he wants, a leaf, a flower, or the fierce demon face of Bhoma. She loves to watch him chip away the stone so cleverly, deep into the big square blocks until the figures seem to jump out at you. Surely the gods will be kind to him.

With easy grace Melati carries on her head a tall basket pyramided with a dozen luscious fruits of the tropics, little packages of betel nut and lime—le-cu-san—done in green leaves, and sweetmeats of yam and palm sugar. She takes it to the priest, waiting to receive it and give blessing. Now she passes on to the door of her favourite altar and lays her jasmine and sweet-scented flowers, and this being one of the special days, before her dance day, Melati hangs a banner of palm strip cut into an intricate pattern of geometrical design symbolizing the sun, moon and stars and holy things. A work of art this. It has taken hours of Melati's skilful patient toil, and is destined to last but a few hours before it shrivels into the past things that have played their part in the rôle

## FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI

When Mata Hari, the Eye of Day, is high, Melati swings along the shining road, smooth and whitish that stretches between the rice-fields. Some of the sawahs are covered with a foot of water where the young rice plants are sprouting. They gleam like mirrors. Some are being ploughed by men knee deep in mud and water, urging the slow carabao into straight lines. Other sawahs are waiting, heavy with the precious grains, waiting for the time when each man in turn, helped by his neighbours, will harvest the plenty that Batara Istri, the Lady of the Rice, yields so easily—if one does not cross her, and does not forget to keep her shrines in the paddies supplied with a little cup of rice and dry, fresh streamers of bamboo, and of course once a week to make an offering of thankfulness to her in the temple.

Melati's full lips curve in a little smile of understanding as she blows the charcoals to a glow. It is for the men to toil in the sawahs and for the women to carry home the harvest and prepare the home rice. It is not so much fun in the kampong to pound and pound with a long heavy pole, down, up and down on the rice grains in their stone mortar. But that is woman's work and it keeps one's back straight and muscles firm. Winnowing is easier. Kneeling in front of a large basket she has only to shake and shift from side to side the loosely woven palm tray until the good kernels are free from the chaff.

Little by little I draw from Melati the happenings of her day, her life, her thoughts and dreams. At noon she takes a delicious rest through the heat of the day. Later with a clean sarong and some powdered stone or soap bar, perhaps even some of that sweet soap that came in

## POISON ARROWS

on the steamers from Boeleleng in the north, she springs along as the day begins to cool, for her bath in the Son of the River nearby. If it is a special occasion, she, with Ninga, goes to the sacred pools at Tirta Empoel, where sparkling water pours forth from a carved lion's mouth; cool water piped down from the mountains. There it is joyous. Ninga goes to the men's pool and she joins the women and children laughing and splashing about in the limpid waters. Soaping herself she kneels or stands under the living water gushing from a dozen spouts. She washes her hair and the sarong she wears, letting it dry and later changes to a fresh one. Then through the gathering dusk she and Ninga eat up the road with quick strong tread and soon they are home again for the evening to say a prayer for the new day.

If it is full moon they may join a procession to the temple where long white banners flutter from the outer gate, again they enjoy the beautiful carving of the images and hear the soft voices of the night. To-morrow is to be the new moon festival to the Rice Goddess. I accept eagerly the invitation to accompany her with Ninga.

To prepare for the new moon festival Melati makes a three-foot cone of fruits and flowers lovingly piled in symmetrical rows of form and colour, oranges, bananas, mangoes, salak, rice cakes, bamboo discs and tassels bound together cone shape in a tall bowl. Placing this towering pyramid of beauty upon her head, with lithe and stately tread she moves along the road in a procession of a hundred bronze goddesses bearing similar gifts. Her slim body, straight back, firm breasts, yield freely to the moon, the breezes; a batik cotton strip around her narrow hips is no impediment to her free,

## FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI

graceful tread. Beautiful even among the beautiful girls of Bali as they wind in single file to the temple where gamelan bells are pouring pæans of praise to the gods. Before entering the temple enclosure, lightly she adjusts a gauzy scarf over her breasts as a mark of respect. It is thus in glamorous half light I best remember her. Like a yellow lily swaying on its stem, she symbolizes Bali to me.

One by one the rich offerings are laid upon the floor of the temple where the priest sprinkles them with holy water from some blessed source in the mountains. After the god music, each is given to eat of the slamatan, the feast of the gods. Reverently the maidens sit on their heels and listen to the sacred epics that Puman Ku reads from the ancient Bali records preserved in the lontars.

That night Melati wears her ilmu, that charm for luck she got at Kloenkoeng last year at a pasar (market place). She has woven for Ninga a wreath of tandjong flowers and another of the same small yellow blooms for Wyan, the first born, Ninga's friend from the next dessa, so that the two youths may wear them as they worship in the temple under the new moon.

I observe Wyan with interest. He has a well-shaped brow and large serious brown eyes; the curves of his mouth are firm like Ardjuna's bow. His nose has a high bridge and the tip turns down, from which his nostrils flare away like small wings. A high class Brahmin face. His lithe figure is straight and strong. As he kneels at prayer, head erect on strong young shoulders, yellow flower behind his left ear against a red turban, looking straight through the flowers which he holds aloft in his clasped hands, I know he is lost in worship of his god.

When Wyan joins us, his smooth skin on this feast day

## POISON ARROWS

is all yellow with boreh, that fragrant yellow pungent powder, and from his kain a faint perfume of ambergris which Melati says she likes better than the scent from akhar wanggi, the sweet-smelling root her mother taught her to sprinkle among the folds of her holiday attire. Ninga tells me that when he carves at the temple he likes best to make the topeng of a god and make it so fierce a mask that it would frighten away the lower air spirits. Wyan always chips flowers out of the red stone. They both play the gangsas peal. None booms the great gong as well as Wyan, not in any dessa along the great road to Den Pasar.

The next morning again I seek Melati in her compound—this gracious girl has so much to teach me.

Remembering Peer Mawith's request to have her pose, I wonder how much romance has stirred in this young heart that seems so guileless. Melati responds thoughtfully to my probings about Wyan.

She sighs a little as she weaves a gold thread in the kain. She is still a sarong not yet unfolded. Perhaps Wyan will some day ask her to be his bride and unfold the sarong. But she will not show him how her heart is because she will not choose him if he does not want her utterly. There are other youths as straight, as clever, but none who speaks to her heart.

But there is time. She is just grown up now. Just ready to dance at the temple, the djanger, which only maidens dance. For so long, for eight years, she has practised, has bent her fingers and twisted her joints. Every days the same poses over and over, each little bit just so, each little turn or posture just right. Melati smiles in her gentle way as she shows me how she does it.

## FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH BALI

But she still must practise to keep in training with the fan. Those backward movements are so hard—to get the fan to open and shut and slant just right. Now she is getting too old for the legong. Some day perhaps she will have to give up and no longer be dressed in gold and jewels and a headdress of gold, stiff with plumes of silver flowers, to do the god dance. Of all the god tales for the dances she especially loves the story of Ardjuna, the Prince of Light conquering Evil.

Two young girls come into the kampong, respond shyly to my greeting. The talk is still about the dance on the morrow at Kedaton to celebrate the Great Burning. Moman and Mode will dance also. They have practised two years less than Melati and only last feast day began dancing the legong. Melati will be fourth flower maiden in the djanger. It is all arranged. Ninga will be eighth on her right.

The little girls flit away and I bring the talk back to Wyan. Melati says that she will be facing the banjar so that she can get a glimpse of him at the great gong. He does not belong to the Kedaton orchestra, but this is a special fête and the big gold bronze gong that cost a thousand dollars has been borrowed from Gianjar and Wyan with it. Not that Wyan will notice her while he is playing, for his whole soul is with the music.

Melati tosses her head a little as she snaps off a thread. It is clear that she will not choose Wyan until she is sure that his regard for her is more than being Ninga's sister; that her image and hers alone will lie always behind those serious dark eyes that so often seem to be dreaming inward as he carves on the temple, or, resting from his labour of god love as he sits like a priest on a stone block

## POISON ARROWS

of the temple gate, hands on his folded knees, silent, meditating. Then she feels very far away; she cannot pierce the veil of his withdrawingness.

Changing the subject I ask Melati about the formal customs and the etiquette of the little court around the Rajah of Kloeng-koeng. But Melati is not concerned with all that adat (etiquette, customs); that is for the handful of quality whose little world does not touch her.

Nor does the iron-hand-in-the-velvet-glove of The Great White Father disturb her. She is hardly aware of the Dutch Governor of Insulinde, in the far-off splendour of his Residency in Java. She does know the heroic history of her people and their fierce resistance to European invasion.

Her slumbrous eyes spark forth strange gleams of fear, pride, horror when she tells me of the last uprising in 1908 when the stalwart men of Bali defied the Dutch guns and when defeat was inevitable, rushed upon the invaders' bayonets—their noble wives and mothers and daughters with them—preferring death to surrender.

## CHAPTER III

### TEMPLE DANCES AT KEDATON

IT is ten o'clock in the morning before I arrive at the temple at Kedaton. The banjar is already in place under the drooping roots and leafy spread of the great banyan tree. The audience in creased linens and wilted silks, is waiting, a score of Europeans, a Dutch official, French, English and Americans from the Den Pasar Hotel six miles away. Their figures look clumsy, if not obese, besides the slim Balinese attired in turbans and fine batik sarongs, who stand like willow wands or gracefully sink to a sitting posture upon their heels.Flushed-faced Europeans seek refuge from the tropic sun in the shadow of a temple wall. They either stand uncomfortably or perch awkwardly upon some improvised seats of boxes and motor car cushions. A few have camp stools. Several cameras are being snapped at anything and everything.

A sudden hush as the gamelon peals out its first strains. My friends have not yet appeared. I explore a little, seeking Melati. In a small kampong of the temple a dozen young girls are gliding about in various stages of make-up. It is their out-door dressing room I have stumbled upon. I soon spy my young friend, with a tender smile, waiting her turn to have her abundant black hair twisted into a huge fan at the back of her head,

## POISON ARROWS

that it may hold the great arc of quivering flowers set in a carved gold band that will frame her face like a virginal aureole. Now Dyak, with a cheroot in her mouth, cleverly paints and powders her face, rouges her lips, darkens her eyebrows, and puts the caste mark of sacred ashes between them. None is so skilled as Dyak in making the girls right for the dances. As Dyak finishes Melati's make-up I watch the young girl wind a piece of gold brocade around her breasts and fasten a Jokta batik sarong with the prescribed gold belt and jewelled buckle. She then puts on a gorgeous collar and adjusts her earrings of rolled-palm. Fully attired for the djanger, Melati now kneels before the priest to be blessed with holy water from the sacred spring before passing out to the dancing place.

I join the group of perspiring tourists waiting in front of the orchestra now playing under the banyan tree outside the temple wall.

No wonder Danhjang Assa, the tutelary god of Melati's village, is pleased when on dance days at the temple the banjar swells out its music. My soul soars into mists of delight as I listen to the great orchestra of jobloks (vibrant woods) and gamelan (gongs) and gangsas (one-string fiddles) live through again one of the great dance dramas that are making Bali a tourist Mecca. One is the legong, another the djanger, danced by maidens blessed by the priest, a third is the gandrong, the music for which swings in a four-bar theme of the anklong (when the gongs play in minor tones).

This must be the legong music. I recognize the two little girls who are to dance it, as already costumed, they wait for their cue. Two young bamboo shoots just

## TEMPLE DANCES AT KEDATON

budding into womanhood, Moman and Mode, are now at the height of their powers. Since they were four years old they have practised the prescribed twists and jerks and postures, the hand and foot work, and have been taught the story of the Ardjuna conquering evil until at ten they appeared for the first time before the public in this Arja sacred drama. Soon, at fourteen, they will be too old; Dyak, now twenty-five, has not danced for ten years, although none surpassed her in the Arjas.

Moman and Mode, in their legong costumes, make a little ache of beauty in the heart. Their slim bodies are swathed tightly in wrappings of gold and silver tissues. From armpits to knees in front and back hangs a flat straight piece of gold embossed tapestry. A pointed collar, stiff with jewels, covers the chest and shoulders. A gold headdress, like a crown, with great rolls at the back, bear plumes of gold and silver flowers and jewels and big discs of rolled metal over the ears, from which hang tassels of metal flowers. Aglitter from head to feet they wait, serene, exquisite, ready.

Now the music of the banjar is changing. First comes the booming of the great gong. Slow, sonorous, one minute apart, gradually quickening until a continuous musical tumble. After a time the little gongs commence and accelerate. Then follows the ringing of one of the tiny brass bells. The banyan tree murmurs response, the bamboo whistles softly. The chanters are taking up the theme of their dance. The two girls kneel before a tiny altar, their massive headdresses held erect, while the priest flicks sacred water upon them. Then, taking their ceremonial fans, they glide forth to the cleared space under the banyan tree. Their stage is a square of bare

## POISON ARROWS

trodden earth formed by the banjar at their backs, now wailing and booming in waves of rolling sound. Moman and Mode flutter fourth fingers of each hand, glancing demurely an invitation to the god who is invisibly looking at them and who can if he wishes, invisibly take their virginity. In front is the nondescript audience, the temple wall on one side and the dessa street on the other where Charles Garvin is now parked in the double shade of his car and a palm tree. Beyond are more temple buildings hidden by high walls.

I stand under the dropping roots of the banyan. Beside me is Moman's sister, Tiya, a young madonna, baby riding her waist in characteristic manner, also watching every move of the complicated posturings, the swing and sweep of the fans; the curve of the hips and bend of knee; each telling to the initiated the progress of the story. Tiya's eyes snap with satisfaction. The climax approaches. Mode assumes the devil's mask of Titan Raksasa personifying Evil, its fringe of white whiskers entirely covering her slight form. Moman, representing Ardjuna the Good, gives battle, finds the vulnerable spot —the tip of the tongue, and slays the Evil One.

The great gamelan of golden bronze shivers in its richly carved wooden frame, a task that has taken seven men seven months to carve as a labour of love. It booms out the final rolling notes of victory, accompanied by a paeon of breath-taking ecstasy from the xylophones, fiddles, bells, cymbals and drums. Magic melody, liquid music, unforgettable sensation impossible to express in the European scale. It dissolves Western consciousness, I melt and flow with the waves of sound. Music that is not written, oral and inherited by memory from old to

MAN MAKES A LITTLE ACHE OF JEALOUSY  
IN THE HEART

lilacinae iradonna

## TEMPLE DANCES AT KEDATON

young, generation to generation. Or, if a modern piece, the composer uses the gong like a piano to give the note and drills each musician in his part.

Now, each player seems inspired by an oversoul of music, eyes unseeing, thoughts turned inward he produces infinite variations in perfect harmony, no two performances alike. Tone poems that swing the listener along a rosy road of emotion, of dreams and glamorous thrills not to be put into words, unless one can capture on the printed page the rhythm of a sunrise, of rain on leaves, the message of moonlight on water, of rainbow arc painting violet and crimson gauze upon a wooded hill, or the compelling allure of a tropic night.

Another rolling, booming, surging crash of the full banjar shivers the air—dies away—the legong is over.

The heat of the morning claims some of the small group of tourists. A motor car departs. Fans wave. Another motor slips quietly away. Upon its shaded rear seat is the bulky figure of Charles Garvin in white duck and the slim trim little person also in immaculate white, sitting very straight, his Dutch courier. Fragments of her correct English phrases, in an unnecessarily loud voice with a metallic foreign accent, reach me.

“The big central gong is very expensive. It cost a thousand guilders. It was cast in Sourabaya. The dances are Hindu in origin. Those girls are very young. Tomorrow we will do the cremation. Very interesting....”

The strident, careful voice fades in the distance and drops suddenly as though the act were finished—a discordant note in this heavenly scene. The ghost of my neglected promise to Peer rises. I sit on a camp stool in the shadow of a temple god and wait for Melati to appear;

## POISON ARROWS

and ponder how I am to keep this native flower from being crushed by the onslaught of a beauty lover, suavely ruthless and indifferent to aught but his art and his passions.

Now she and nine other girls who are to do the djanger file onto the dancing space and sit upon their heels—bodies, arms and hands in proper pose. They are in two lines facing each other. The other sides of the hollow square are formed by a dozen young men. In the centre, gorgeous in dark blue silks and gold, with Ardjuna's kris at his back, sits Puman-Ku, the priest. Chanters take up the ever new tale of the fight between Good and Evil. The banjar is now diminished to jobloks and gangsas, from which flows an exquisite undertone of the story. The melody, the dancing, the setting, form an alchemy of inspiration as Melati sways and postures and snaps her fingers, having due care that the waving arc of the flower headdress does not come to grief. I hear Wyan striking the great notes on the gamelan behind and see Melati turn and flash a glance, although well she knows he will not see it. His soul is far away in the realm of the story which his music is interpreting. His eyes have that unseeing, yet uplifted, look that Ninga also has while playing the xylophone, his soul interpreting the theme of the music.

Especially I like the end of the djanger when the Garuda, steed of Vishnu, grotesque gryphon, half-man, half-bird, with his hideous mask, hideous enough to frighten anyone, either the quick or the dead, appears above the temple wall and, climbing over it, drops to the ground for the final scene with the Prince of Good. Something within Melati, and within me, sings in joy to

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GREAT BURNING AT AMIANTIBUL

As the short twilight fades, I slip along the village street. Smoke from the incense of cocoa-husk cooking fires mingles with the musky night. Quietly I enter Melati's kampong. She rises from her heels and greets me silently. To-morrow is the day of the Great Burning, reverent preparations are in progress. With a graceful gesture of the right hand she seizes the edge of a large bamboo tray filled with rice cakes which she has been making, and resting the opposite end upon her hip she throws a gauzy scarf over her left arm. She sticks a creamy melati bloom in her hair above her forehead, straightens the folds of her one garment draping her slender body from the waist down. She puts two cylindrical rolls of white patu an inch in diameter, two inches in length, into the large holes in the lobes of her ears. Being made of fresh palm leaf they are springy enough to remain in place. As she walks across the kampong to the palm-thatched hut that serves as a kitchen and where a small charcoal fire is awaiting the rice cakes, a small black pig grunts towards her and several chickens stop scratching in the dust, eyeing her hopefully. The young girl with her winsome little smile, her full upper lip a little parted from its fellow, good-naturedly scatters a few grains of the precious rice.

## THE GREAT BURNING

Soberly now she puts the rice cakes to bake, for these are special slamatan, feast food, to be added to the many trays of fruit and little piles of coins and a box containing jewellery, a bracelet of carved red gold, two rings, one set with large de lima (tourmeline), all waiting for the cremation to-morrow. She points out a small shrine house wherein repose two flat bundles, dried and reduced to neatly folded bones, each wrapped in a fine batik kain. She tells me her mother's brother went first, and for two years night and day some one of the family has kept vigil with his spirit in the death pavilion and filled the rice cup daily. It was not seemly to release his spirit through the sacred fire while mother's mother still lingered on this plane of earth. Now five months ago the honourable one walked out of her body, and the priest has sanctioned the release of both spirits by The Burning. Each was wrapped loosely in a kain and then mummified with lime and sweet-scented herbs and folded in a square bundle ready for the great day of release.

It has been a sad drain on the family, keeping up a constant little feast for the relatives and friends who have kept vigils these long months, that no harm would come to the spirits of the departed while held to their bodies. Her father and Ninga have worked long on the sawahs to get more and more rice to pay for their share of the funeral bier. Fortunately all the departed ones in Melati's dessa are of the same caste, so no lion or fish biers will be necessary.

Melati is very proud of their bier. Offers to show it to me. Together we go to the temple kampong where I photograph this extraordinary coffin. For weeks Melati has watched it grow into the shape of a monstrous bull

## POISON ARROWS

twice as large as the sleek fawn-coloured cow that gives milk for the dessa people. First the shell was made of wood, hollow with a lid on top, then painted bright purple with sacred crescent moons on the shoulders and haunches and neck. Then a big white crescent at the corners of its wide open mouth, fearsome red lips and gleaming teeth. Sometimes the horns are made removable. Now all is ready; the gorgeous collar and harness of openwork gold lace paper and green and purple chenille set with bamboo discs, are in place. A long scarf of red silk and gold thread hangs from its neck, and showers of fragrant white Cambodia flowers droop below each huge red ear. Securely fastened to a bamboo platform it is waiting for its part in the next day's ceremonies.

Many ringits it has cost. But now the 'Great Dutch Father' has decreed that not more than one thousand six hundred ringits (\$4,000 gold) can be spent upon a cremation and—Melati's thoughts go off at a tangent—thirty to forty ringits for a bride. If she should choose Wyan for a husband he need not make even that many presents to her family, she says proudly. No amount of money will compensate her father for the loss of his daughter, for has she not been almost wife as well as daughter? For it is many years, four, no five years since the gentle beautiful mother became spirit, and no longer can teach her the many household duties, how to cook, how to pound the rice and weave the kains, how to cut the worship patterns on a bamboo leaf and catch dragon flies for the spirit ambrosia which her father loves. Often at early night she has taken her wand covered with glue and caught the fire-flies, oh, so many of them, and fried them in cocoa oil to pleasure her father as he sips tuak,

## THE GREAT BURNING

the palm wine eighteen hours old, which she has made for him. Once when he went north to Singaradja he was so pleased with her that he stopped at dessa Bratan where the gold and silver workers are and bought her a most beautiful ring of carved gold set with de lima stones around a Bansin (cat's eye). She has kept it in the beaten silver box with the gold snake-headed bracelet which had been her mother's chief treasure. Another time honourable father brought her a gorgeous kain of crimson silk stiff with gold threads woven in an ancient pattern by the daughter of Princess Patimah herself.

The cremation is a great event in Melati's sixteen years. In her gentle voice she tells me that since her mother has gone to Tintiya's realm and one aunt is ill and the other aunt will bear her sister's husband to the pyre, in the absence of older female relatives even she, Melati, will carry the second sacred dead. She must walk very straight; no matter how uneven the ground, the precious bundle must not be allowed to fall from her head.

It is a long walk to Abiantibul, the place that has been selected for the cremation. In a great field near a running stream, through a grove of trees, seven miles she must walk behind the Great Purple Bull. They will make it cavort and behave in a silly manner to scare away the evil spirits and to make the big spirits think that it is not meant for their dead. Three times they will carry it around the cremation field. Ninga will see that it dances madly. Oh, it is to be a very big Burning indeed! Are there not nine of these coffins, each from a different dessa? Sixty-four bundles like those in the kampong are going to be burned in the ceremonial. Eight biers,

## POISON ARROWS

to say nothing of the Rajah's wadah, which is to be five tiers high and has cost two thousand gold ringits to build.

Wyan is to make the devil-scaring music. He will wear a terrifying costume of black with stripes fluttering on it and a topeng all black with a big nose and white lips and white spots and stripes. No spirit will look at him and stay, and when he makes the devil-scaring music the long hollow notes boom—one will feel strange inside.

Melati shows me her best sarong, a lovely thing from Solo, of plant and bird pattern, an exquisite batik pattern of peacocks on a white ground once used only by royalty. She would like to wear it for the Burning but she must wear something more sober. She unfolds a sarong of a tjeplok pattern, geometric squares and crosses of browns and darker browns, that also has come from Java, painted by one of the finest batik workers in Jokjakarta. Only the best will do the Burning ceremony.

Melati's lips are parted showing a 'white smile'. Diligently she polishes her incisors with brick dust to free them from the stain of the nut juice with which she as carefully blackens her molars, also to clean them from the red stain of the siri. Dearly she loves to chew le-cusan, the betel nut and lime; chew it till her mouth is sore from its sharp pungency. She often restrains herself from indulging in the seductive little packet nestling in its glossy bit of leaf, so that she may keep her 'white smile' for Wyan.

The cakes are done. Mechanically the girl lifts them off the brazier and with the easy grace that characterizes her movements, she pours a handful of rice into a pot

## THE GREAT BURNING

for the evening meal, adds water which she dips from a bamboo tube and leaves it for the members of the family to help themselves when they choose. On a fresh leaf she lays out plantains and chimoys, salak, its white firm pulp tasting something like a pineapple; and for drink, fresh young cocoanut milk with a dash of lime juice.

"I must remember to tie my scarf well up under my arms as one does when praying in temples and when dressing for the god dances," she says. "I am glad I do not live in Singaradja or any of the North Bali towns, where the fashion now makes one wear that terrible kabaya (bodice) of Java that squeezes one's arms and breasts like a vice. Surely one can hardly take a decent breath." Her thoughts still intent upon the events of the next day, which has now begun at sundown of the present day, she continues her preparations.

"Now I must sacrifice a chicken to the spirits that they may be appeased," and, suiting the action to the thought, she makes a grab at one of the unsuspecting fowl. A scuffle, a squawk, one end of a long string tied securely about its neck, Melati takes her struggling composition of air and earth through the kampong outside the gate that pierces the long unbroken wall of the dessa street, and hangs it on a pole near the spirit house. The evil spirits fly very low and do not rise high enough to get over the wall. When they see the bird at the threshold of heaven and earth they will look no further through the gate. Melati also puts fresh rice and bits of banana on the spirit house. About the size of a bird cage with a little roof over it, it swings high from the branch of a tree. She explains that all along the road leading to Abiantibul, wherever there is a loved one waiting done up in a neat

## POISON ARROWS

little bundle, there will be a chicken swinging near the gate of that kampong.

In the soft scented dusk she stands musing. Overhead the palm leaves day-talk, bamboos whisper mysterious messages in the nearby grove, sometimes a trunk caresses another trunk in a staccato squinch, or perhaps it is a tree spirit speaking. The brook, Anak Sungei, Son of the River, murmurs greeting to the stones as it skips over and around them.

As I leave her, moving away silently, I know that the gates of wonder swing open a little for Melati. Her soul, attuned to nature's language, drifts deeper into sympathetic understanding of a vast silent force working, transforming; biding its time, unfolding a flower, withering a leaf, beginning all things in the dark, bringing forth to the light. Nature tirelessly at work and supremely at rest in her inmost being.

In imagination I follow her through the night.

"Tintiya," perhaps she whispers, "let me know beauty. Let me dream true." In her heart she repeats verses that the priest, Puman-Ku, the keeper of the shrine, who wears a white kain, has taught her. He reads them from a lontar, a sacred book of palm leaves cut with ancient characters, perhaps in Pali, and rubbed in black with India ink preserved between covers of sweet-scented wood.

Perhaps she remembers some of the wise sayings which she quoted to me one day in the temple.

"Nature holds the secret, for Nature is not the veil of the Divine, but Divinity itself, and being so can interpret man's divinity to him."

"Within to sound the deeps of the waters of mystery,

## THE GREAT BURNING

without to wander at will through the portals of concentration."

The deep in her calls to the deep about her. "Tintiya," she prays as Puman-Ku has taught her, "show me the Truth which hides behind my daily life. Show me that it is a dream, the shadow of a shadow. May I see the light, know that all this does not exist. Make me awake to Thee—to reality."

Far off a bell sounds. Soon it will be the moon-of-the-night (midnight) and Melati must be up when Mata Hari peeps through the mango tree.

Silently, swiftly, she turns from the leaves whispering their god messages, passes to a corner of the kampong, noting as she does that her aunt is keeping vigil with the spirit of her departed husband.

In her airy thatched room of plaited bamboo she shakes free her hair, takes out her palm-leaf rolls of ear-ring, puts on a night sarong and seizing a slandang she partially wraps herself in the broad folds of the scarf and lies down upon a woven rattan bed.

Surely the serious face of Wyan playing the gong comes before her. His sensitive young mouth with its hint of sternness, the inward look of his eyes. "Wyan, have you lifted the curtain of silence and eaten the lotos of dreams? Oh, Wyan, teach me—perhaps—" A soft sound as of things breathing in the night, a little sigh from those red, full, curved lips. Melati sleeps.

The great day of Burning! As I take the sunrise-breakfast, enjoy the bath and struggle through a sticky toilet my imagination again follows Melati as she springs to her feet with one lithe movement of the body,

## POISON ARROWS

and glides swiftly to the Son of the River. As she steps into the little brook, the Eye of Day is already tingeing the tree trunks with a band of vibrant red; yellow red. The day will be hot; the gods are blessing it. There will be no rain to bring bad luck. Ninga is already with the men who are to carry the sacred bull. As Melati completes her toilet, wraps the tjeplok sarong around her waist, secures it with an extra scarf and adds the white slendang across her breasts, during ceremonies they must be covered, she can hear the low murmur of excited voices as the bull coffin, resplendent in gold and silver and purple and white is lifted upon the shoulders of twenty men and boys ready for the long march to Abiantibul. Hastily she knots her black tresses in the double loop with a trailing wisp of hair as a maiden should, twists her head cloth into secure folds and goes to the family shrine to find her aunt already there.

Solemnly each places a long-stemmed bowl upon her head and lifts the sacred bundle of the dead into position upon it. Without words Melati follows her aunt and joins the procession now strung along the road. Everyone makes way for them respectfully and they soon join the group of eight other mourners in their allotted position behind the sacred bier.

The roads beyond Den Pasar are thronged with those going to the great field at Abiantibul. With Peet Mawith I follow the procession in a motor. In possession of another is Charles Garvin with his courier, in a stiff tailored suit, laden with camp stool, umbrella and thermos bottle. She concentrates her attention upon her client, and is apparently oblivious of anyone else—especially

## THE GREAT BURNING

does she become deaf and blind when Garvin speaks to us. I sense an overwhelming embarrassment under this Dutch solidity. Garvin's definite refusal to present her to his friends suggests the irregularity of their arrangement which otherwise might be open to doubt. With a shrug Peer dismisses the matter: "Why doesn't old Charles do as in Paris—place that 'Dutch wife' of his on his left and thus make her officially invisible?"

My eyes search for Melati who symbolizes all this pageant for me. At last I see her but make no comment to Peer; and what happens to Garvin or his companion is of small moment.

A fantastic creature, as Melati had described, is now being made to cavort in a startling manner so as to frighten away evil spirits and make them think there is nothing serious afoot. A small band of musicians carry instruments and when the procession halts for frequent rests the special gamelan bells peal out, accompanied by minor chanting. Anon the piercing notes of a one-string fiddle rend the air in a short frightening wail. The big gamelan is silent to-day, being never used for cremations. In the third of eight sacred image processions, I watch Melati tread through the dust proudly carrying her precious burden on her head. It is hot. The walk has been long, but she gives no sign of fatigue. She knows she will be purified by wading through the running water which has been blessed by the priests and through which everyone must pass before entering the cremation ground.

The sun has trod to the midheaven and started his western course when Melati hears the bells and drums ahead break into peals of joyous rhythm that announce

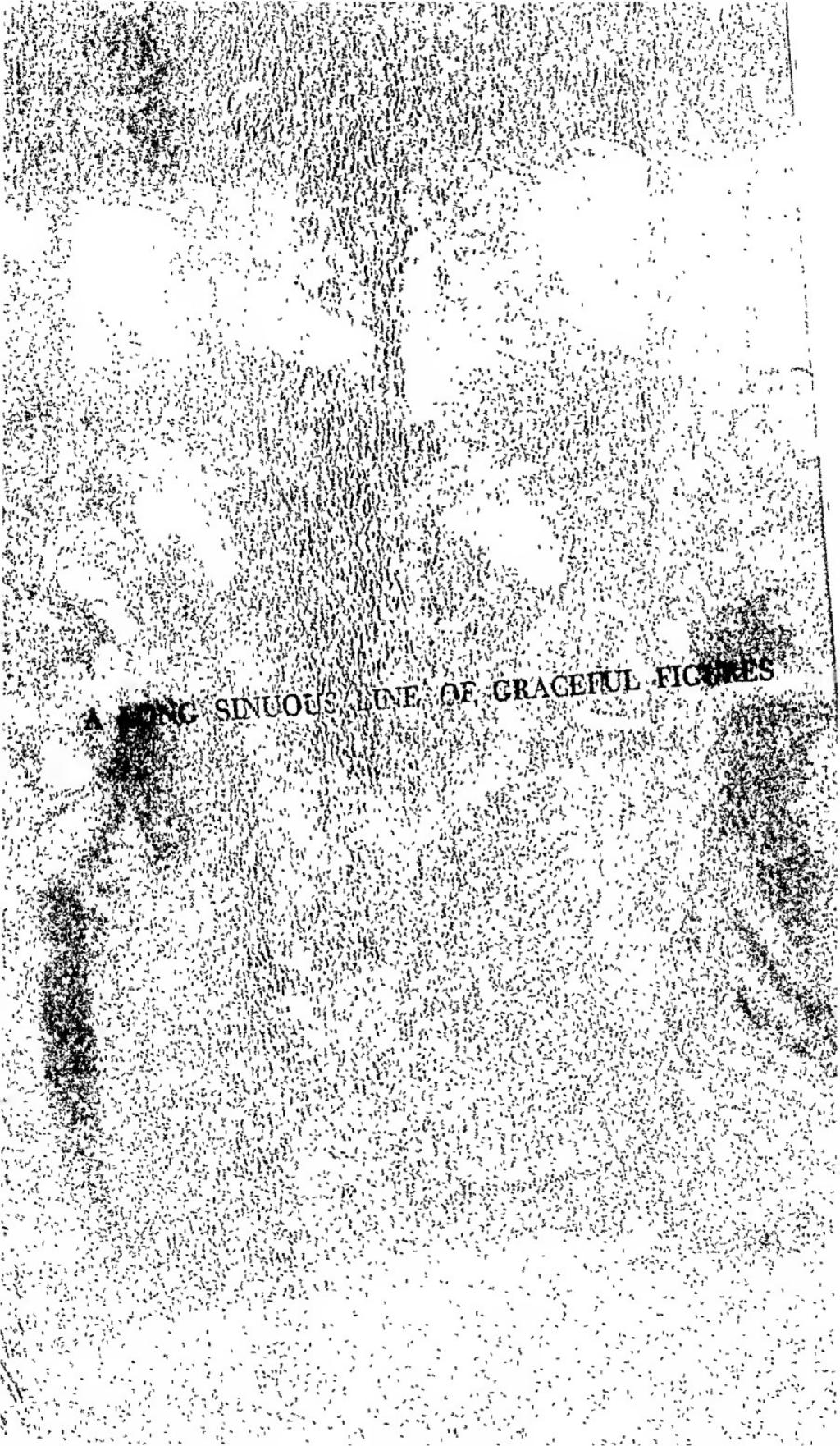
## POISON ARROWS

to her the long march is ending. Swooping through the shallow stream without a stop, the great procession advances at rapid pace, for the Rajah's wadah has arrived on the field, carried on human shoulders, and been set down, the hundred straining men delivered of their burden are placing an inclined platform gaily decorated with coloured cloths and bamboo tassels from the ground to the first tier of the Cremation Tower twenty feet up, where a fierce winged Naga in gold and jewelled carvings guards the Rajah's remains. Nine tiers, the number allotted to royalty, tower to the sky above the Rajah's altar gay with coloured kains and tassels and jewels and carved lace paper.

Near the glittering structure is a long raised platform with a thatched roof. It is designed to hold the nine sacred animal altars with their precious dead, the funeral pyre for sixty-four loved ones who are to pass over the Bridge of Fire and be released from mortal's lot.

Melati is in her place in a procession of over three hundred women. In single file they swing through the field three times to the cremation platform, a long sinuous line of graceful figures balancing upon their jet-haired, white-turbanned heads not only the mummies, each square batik-covered bundle crowned by a peaked circle of finely woven rattan, but rich offerings of fruit, flowers, rice, and baskets of money, jewels and various family treasures.

The mummies are now placed in their respective animal coffins already in position upon the burning platform. The people press close with further offerings, glittering masses of good things, the essence of which when passed through the fire is destined to enrich the



A FADING SINUOUS LINE OF GRACEFUL FIGURES

## THE GREAT BURNING

pilgrims to another world. Wild chanting, loud songs, a crackling and snapping and thick smoke as the funeral pyres are fired.

While the purifier is doing its work of releasing the souls of the departed from their earthly vibrations Melati joins me in the crowd around the Ghost Dancers. I am glad that Peer has prudently sought the shade of a banyan tree and hope he does not see us together. Soon he waves good-bye from a motor full of tourists who already have had enough. They are bound for the hotel veranda and cold drinks.

Eagerly Melati's eyes strain to distinguish Wyan among the ghost players. Despite his mask and hideous bands of black and white zigzagging around his body, she knows him. Points him out. Is he not more beautiful than any other, slim and straight and sinewy?

She watches the capers of the Ghost Dancers, all designed to draw away from the liberated souls any attention from the Watchers of the Threshold who might tempt the bewildered travellers in a strange land, harass their way and lead them into evil paths.

"A long time ago," Melati says, "the aunt of my mother's mother threw herself upon the burning wadah of her husband that her spirit might be released by the purifying fire to go to him. But Puman-Ku says no one does suttee now, not even in India."

Ninga approaches, hands Melati a drink of cocoanut milk cool and sweet from the shell. He buys for her some date cakes from a vendor who carries his wares upon a woven rattan tray. They discuss the next and final scene of this ceremony. Soon the sacred ashes of the dead must be scattered upon the broad waters of the sea, that

## POISON ARROWS

their souls may be fully freed from earth. Ninga agrees to walk with Melati to Koela several miles away, the nearest point on the ocean.

I dare not interfere with their sacred pilgrimage. Following slowly in a motor I wait until the final rite is completed, then invite brother and sister to ride back to the home kampong. They accept, without enthusiasm. Whether they are home in an hour or trudge the roads till the coming of a new day seems of equal choice to these children of Bali.

The curtain of a tropic night drops abruptly as I return to the Den Pasar Hotel—shower baths, evening gowns, table silver, shrill laughter and nasal chatter. The soft-treading, spirit-feeling, flower-scented East recedes into a glowing memory.

## CHAPTER V

MELATI POSES; MRS. FIX-IT DISPOSES  
—FINIS ON STURDZA

IT is happening—Kismet. For two or three days I have not seen Melati. The panorama of sight-seeing has unfurled new beauties, new wonders of this glorious island where the ‘wet rice-fields in mirrors swirl’.

Studying the glowing tapestry of a happy people for the past weeks, with Melati an able, though unwitting, teacher, I realize that here is a community that lives its music, lives its art, lives its religion. Their thoughts harmoniously work out in action. As their thoughts have simple beauty, responsive to nature’s tropical rhythm, the general tenor of their lives is beauty, richly, gently expressed. Whether working in the rice-fields, swinging with straight carefree stride along the woods, or performing the simple duties of the kampong or communal service in the dessa; whether carving free-hand on the temples, or making sumptuous offerings of fruits and flowers to the Great Spirit back of all the godlets; whether rolling out thundering peals of joy, thrilling, soul stirring, in ever-new themes of the gamelan —these people are like their fragrant flowers, limpid brooks, feathery and useful bamboo, their mountain opal mists. They are expressions of nature—an integral centre of creation—in a happy mood. The Dutch, until

## POISON ARROWS

recently, have wisely left them alone to bloom in their own blessed isolation, now the round-the-world-tripper is bringing sophistication. The alchemy of our vaunted civilization, its economic and personal complexities, greed, wars, must change the gentle pastoral picture into, what?

Reflecting on these things at early breakfast, I notice Peer is unusually lively on his side of the partition. His white linens are even more immaculate than usual as his middle-aged and well-fed figure walks quietly past me on the hotel walk. Theoretically I am invisible but usually he sings out a greeting. A Malay boy with paint box, umbrella, folding stool and easel follows him. What is taking Peer abroad so early and evidently not to the native house which he uses as a studio?

A dark presentiment assails me. Cancelling my motor for the morning, the trip to Kloeng Koeng and further study of quaint frescoes on the Palace of Justice can wait, I choose the coolest costume available. It is white silk striped in yellow, and pure silk, for well I know that rayon or even silk mixtures lose their simulated virtues under the rigours of tropical sun, hard water and wash boys.

As I approach the outer gate of Melati's kampong, a low musical laugh floats towards me. Lower notes in English and then the murmuring assonances of masculine tones in Balinese. I do not need to see what is behind that high mud wall that secures privacy from the village street. Peer Mawith through his Malay boy as interpreter is making progress in the good graces of Melati.

Maskee! What of it! Shall I intrude! or stand aside watching the fateful touch of civilization upon the delicate fabric of native beauty? Peer as the serpent in this

## MELATI POSES

Balinese Eden will not prove, I am certain, a Naga or sacred serpent. At least I will have a look-see. I enter the kampong, Melati unfolds her slim young length from squatting on her heels, greets me with pleasure and the same clear laugh flows out. Evidently Eve is yet to be offered the apple. Perhaps Wyan and romance may still be possible.

Peer nods to me from his stool, easel before him, and continues to sketch in the outline of a full-length almost nude figure. His artist's eye transferring with appreciation the graceful hip lines, the firm rounded breasts and regal carriage of the head. He makes no comment about my failure as a go-between. Discerning Ninga in the shadows of the house, I understand. The characteristic hunter tactics are successful. Through the unsuspecting brother is this meeting accomplished. On Melati's little finger is a new ring of Balinese rubies, all the stones held in an exquisite gold carving, the secret of which the jewellers of India bequeathed to her ancestors. A new rosy scarf woven so thickly with pure gold thread that it could stand alone, is lying in stiff folds upon the house steps.

How many of the thirty ringits necessary for a bridal gift have also passed from one beringed, manicured hand to another male one, slimmer and browner, I wonder—and quickly dismiss the thought. Well I know that no gold can buy Melati's love. It will be freely given, if at all. Will she succumb to this determined, tempestuous, lordly wooing of an alien rajah? How can she know that she will be Madame Butterfly but for a day or a week, until the painting is finished and the great one sails away on the blue water never to return. Then again a hair-line

## POISON ARROWS

chance will govern Peer's actions. The picture may be finished without the occasion arising when old-ivory flesh moulded into lithe beauty and the allure of virgin heart in primitive simplicity kindles fires in this sybarite strong enough to burn away barriers of time and place.

If only these happy people could be left in peace! The very charm of their little island and of its simple self-contained life is bringing about its exploitation. The Dutch are pouring in visitors on tour as at a peep-show. The missionaries itch to get at this Arcadia and impose their particular religious conventions and mother-hubbards. At least this one sweet-scented flower must be allowed to bloom and fructify with the romance of silver nights and slim bodies weaving a wreath of tropic joy.

Overhead a magnificent mango tree spreads its multiple slim fingers between Melati and the blazing sun. A waringen makes gentle swishing music in the hot breeze. A threefold plan presents itself as I absently note the diapered pattern of a papaia tree trunk. It bears aloft a crown of serrated leaves which shade clumsy clusters of bulbous fruit like half-inflated green balloons. Melati's kampong is a study in tropic greens—palms, yellowish; papaia, light; mango, bottle; cocoanuts, dark.

Yes, I have an idea! But will it work? Leaving the excited artist and his lovely model who now assumes a classic pose, left arm hanging free, the right hand holding high a small basket with flowers trailing from it, I go into the house and converse with Ninga. My Malay is not aristocratic, but the pidgin variety serves me well. He accepts the thought that foreign etiquette requires that he must always be in sight and hearing while his sister is posing. The second thread in this little fabric I am weav-

## MELATT POSES

ing he also, although unknowingly, agrees to spin. He thinks he can easily obtain Wyan's consent to sell the bronze gong that has come down to him from 'father's father's father', now cracked and useless for playing. The price, forty ringits, will be enough for a bride and gifts. Perhaps some will be left to buy a new warrior bird for a cockfight, where a little blood might be spilled to please the gods at the temple upon so happy an occasion. Yes, he knows what Wyan will do with that money. And the two families will make much slamat over the wedding.

Boeleleng at sunset—the steamer is pushing off for Soerabaya, Java. My stay on the enchanting island is over. I have had a few days in South Bali crowded with sightseeing of the tourist variety. I fed sacred monkeys in Sangeh's whispering grove, one mother monkey, very active, jumping here and there with her baby clinging to her breast. I stood in awe amid the giant roots, like a cathedral, of the banyan at Bong Kias. I burned a sheaf of rice straw before the Elephant god in whose cave linger horrors of old torturing and decapitations. I went through rice paddies to curious rock temples. I ate apple-like mangoes and other strange fruits, and little bits of pork skewered on bamboo sticks; stung the mouth with the scarlet seeds of the lombok pepper; drunk a native concoction of arak tasting like lysol. I saw the Bat Temple where the twittering denizens hang like over-ripe plums to the roof of the cave.

As I watch the hot sun seek its western rim the North Bali shore recedes and a deep regret assails me that it must be so soon.

My regret is tempered by one pleasant note. On the

## POISON ARROWS

deck appears Charles Garvin and his courier. They are occupying cramped quarters, as the S.S. *Batavia* is crowded and the extra space which Garvin has reserved is accommodately given up to Peer. He is painting the portrait of the American financier and unexpectedly curtails his stay in Bali to have more sittings on the steamer. Thus my third thread in the little Balinese romance was spun of American gold, French thrift and human pride.

Neither Charles Garvin nor Peer Mawith have any idea how the plan started of a portrait that will hang in the Paris Salon and ultimately upon a mahogany wall in a New York Director's room. Nor are a happy Wyan nor a shy twinkling-eyed bride-to-be aware of the sentimental Mrs. Fix-it who played a tiny part in their lives of simple beauty on a tropic isle now fading into amaranthine sea.

A batch of forwarded mail is in my pocket waiting for the first leisure moment. Running through the much-marked envelopes for letters from home one arrests my attention.

I stare at my own handwriting. It is addressed to my quondam guide and friend, Baron Antalffy-Sturdza. Across the face of it is written in French: "Return to sender. Addressee not found."

I have a feeling that inquiry in Saigon will produce no more information. He has vanished from my world.

Was it another accident, or has he 'gone native'? More probably dead, too much opium, or a subtle poison from a jealous woman. The East keeps its secrets. Among them the understanding of the root of birth and death. It teaches that Buddha—Enlightenment—is in the bones of each one of us, ambushed within us unseen,

## MELATI POSES

like the Golden Dragon, the sun, when he leaps behind a cloud.

The East writes finis of Baron György Antalffy-Sturdza, one who lived as his mother would have him, true to his own standards of a European gentleman.

The threads of desire reach towards home. Home under a patriarchal action-picture of strife, hate, injustice, strikes, diminishing personal freedom; also of stupendous achievement, self-sacrifice, charity and public service, the eternal struggle for the common good, of understanding and love.

The dark and sinister picture of Indo China's decaying peoples under a foreign whip, the intriguing overlay of modernity on Siam's ancient opulent pattern and finally Bali's scroll of a happy people adjusted to their tropic scene. I leave them for the hysteria of Western civilization—for home.

THE END